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Stephen Brown Bathe, M.A.,
Balliol, Rector of Ruckhurst
1912.

1017 f. 31

THE CHURCH OF THE FIRST DAYS.

THE CHURCH OF THE FIRST DAYS:

LECTURES ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

BY

C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.

MASTER OF THE TEMPLE,
AND CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY TO THE QUEEN.

II.

THE CHURCH OF THE GENTILES.

THIRD EDITION.

London:
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1874.

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Cambridge:
PRINTED BY C. J. CLAY, M.A.
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

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LECTURE I.

THE WONDERFUL CONVERSION.

ACTS IX. 11.

Behold, he prayeth.

CONVERSION is a word on many lips. And it is a good word; it comes from the Holy Scriptures, and it denotes a transition from death to life.

We are to read of a conversion now. Let us ponder it well. Let us mark its beginning, course, and end; its first sign, and its last; *Behold, he prayeth;* and, *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away, and, behold, all things are become new.* Conversion is first a change of mind, and secondly a change of life.

The conversion of which we are now to read, was an event concerning *us* in no common degree. To it we of this land probably owe our Christianity. Let us hope that we owe more

to it than even this: not only a light around, but a light within; not only the knowledge of a Gospel, but the possession of a Saviour.

We have heard of the person before. At the cruel execution of Stephen he was a consenting and approving bystander. He *kept the raiment of them that slew him.* No ray of conviction seems to have visited his mind in consequence of what he then witnessed. The words of Stephen, his calm and bold defence, his dying prayer for his murderers, his dying testimony to the manifested glory of Christ, as he saw Him standing in the opened heaven at the right hand of God, none of these things then moved him: he still *made havoc of the Church;* he still *persecuted the Church of God, and wasted it;* he still *persecuted them oft in every city, compelling them to blaspheme.* And yet in all this he was but acting *ignorantly in unbelief.* He was fulfilling our Lord's prophecy, *Yea, the time cometh, when he that killeth you will think that he doeth God service.* But there was an eye over him through all this; a hand controlling, and soon to coerce; a voice saying, in a tone not to be withstood, *Thus far shalt thou come, and no further.*

The narrative is introduced in contrast

with a different spirit and a different journey. Philip had been sent on a commission, not from the Sanhedrin, but from God Himself; not to persecute Christ's people, but to add to them; not to carry chains and death, but to convey peace and joy into a burdened and benighted heart.

But Saul, unlike him, *still breathing of threatening and murder against the disciples of the Lord, came to the high priest, and asked from him letters to Damascus to the synagogues,* addressed to the officers of the various Jewish synagogues in Damascus, *that if he found any persons to be of the way, both men and women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.*

The state of Saul's mind at the outset of this journey is described in very strong terms. He was *still breathing of threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord.* His every breath was menace and murder. To such lengths may prejudice and self-opinion carry even a conscientious man!

The object of his journey was to discover any persons belonging to *the way.* This is an expression often met with in the Acts. Sometimes it is called *the way of salvation;* sometimes *the way of the Lord;* sometimes *the way*

of God; sometimes, as here, more briefly, *the way.* True religion, it reminds us, is not idleness, but exertion; not sitting still, but going forwards. We are all on our way some whither; and in that way we have a Master, a Guide, a Leader, under whose care and protection we shall find salvation, we shall find rest and a home at the last.

And as he journeyed, it came to pass that he was drawing near to Damascus, on the 5th or 6th day perhaps of his journey, *and suddenly there shone around him a light out of the heaven.*

In one of his own later narratives of the event he says that it was *at mid-day* that this light gleamed upon him; and that it was distinguishable even from the blaze of an Eastern noon; it was *above the brightness of the sun.* His attention was to be arrested, and the Creator of light and of the sun knew how to do this effectually.

And he fell upon the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? We are told, in his own fuller narrative, that the voice spake to him *in the Hebrew tongue.* It was no mere fancy: the words were distinctly audible; they were the words of a known language; and they asked a question

with reference to the errand on which he had come. *Saul, Saul why persecutest thou me?* He is known by name in heaven. His life is open there. His commission, his purpose in this journey, every secret of his heart, is read above; and he is asked *why* he thus persecutes Him who suffers with and suffers in every affliction of His people. How strange, how mysterious a question! A man whose whole life is given to treading out this spark of what he deems fatal error, this catching and spreading flame of a (to him) falsely so called Gospel, is asked from heaven what he is doing and why: what has this Person who speaks done that He should be thus hated, thus opposed, thus injured? May not the same question sound in some heart amongst us? What has Jesus Christ done that we should thus neglect, thus despise, thus sin against Him, personally, or in His little ones? Testify against Him this day, how has He injured thee? Has He not shed for thee His own blood? Why should it be that, *the more abundantly He loves, the less He is loved?*

And he said, Who art Thou, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee—so the common Version pro-

ceeds, though probably this clause is inserted from the fuller narrative in the 26th chapter—*to kick against the goads.* He who often spake in parables below, speaks still in proverbs above. It is hard for thee, it is a folly and a cruelty to thyself, thus to kick against the goad that drives thee: it can but make the iron enter more deeply into thy flesh; it can but increase the pain of thy pursuit and of thy capture. What a Sermon might be preached on those words; on the sinner fighting against his God; refusing mercy, resisting grace, and bringing upon himself by his own perverseness a ruin which God would have averted!

Again a clause follows in our English Version, drawn, in substance, from the fuller narrative of the 22nd chapter, where, if life be spared, we shall meet it hereafter. The shorter text here stands thus, without interruption: *I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: but rise and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.* Space must be given for conviction to have its perfect work, before the new life could profitably begin, or the new trust be safely undertaken. We are always for precipitation: when a new idea presents itself, we rush, fit or unfit, to act upon it: but God is a

God of patience: He proceeds calmly and therefore surely to His ends: *in due time* is written upon all His works, and therefore none has to be recalled or done again. *Enter into the city, and there, in due time, it shall be told thee what thou must do.*

And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but beholding no one. In St Paul's own narratives of the event, in the 22nd and 26th chapters, he says, *When we were all fallen to the earth;* and again, *They that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me.* These varieties, for contradictions they are not, prove one thing; that the descriptions of the sacred writers are free and independent: they have one great mark of truth upon them, that they are not studied and servile; they do not echo each other's words, they tell each its own story; there is none of that elaborate guarding and fencing of expressions, none of that careful reconciliation of statement with statement, which every court of justice regards with strong suspicion as a sure indication of design and falsehood. Easy would it have been for St Luke, the writer of this history, to compare the 9th chapter with the 22nd and

with the 26th, and to bring the three into a rigid, verbal consistency. That he did not do so is a proof of his veracity, of his single-mindedness, of his confidence in the force of truth. We can all reconcile for ourselves: it is a waste of time to dwell upon the probable suppositions, that (1) they who first fell afterwards stood, or they who first stood (that is, stopped their journey) then fell terrified to the earth: or again, (2) that those who heard the sound of a voice did not hear the words spoken, and that those who saw the light yet saw no one, no person—the form of the Speaker was visible to Saul, and to him only. These are the mere easinesses of a popular narrative. The Word of God is not so unstable, as to dread exposure from varieties which rather turn to it for a testimony.

And Saul arose (or *was raised*) *from the ground, and when his eyes were opened, he saw nothing:* "blinded with excess of light," he sought in vain to distinguish objects: *but leading him by the hand they brought him into Damascus. And he was for three days without sight, and ate not nor drank.*

Who can imagine the thoughts of remorse and anguish which filled his mind during those

days of darkness? A whole lifetime must have been lived again: every opinion, every principle, every feeling, had to be reviewed and reversed: that which he had loved, now he hated; and that which had been highly esteemed was now becoming an abomination. Did not the figure of the dying Stephen now haunt his memory? What would he now have given for the counsel and comfort of him whom he had helped to murder? But it is vain to enlarge upon these topics: the silence of Scripture is more eloquent than man's words, and we can but ponder in our hearts that brief yet most expressive saying, *He was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.*

God sees, my brethren, what man is so slow to see, the value of a season of spiritual suffering, to those more especially whom He destines for a high place in His ministry and in His glory. All the greatest lights of His Church in all ages have had such a kindling. Without this, it is scarcely possible for some colours of beauty and holiness to be burnt into the character. If any one here present is in trouble of this kind; walking in doubt and darkness, and seeing no light; I would counsel him already to give God thanks for it: whatever it be, how-

ever much or however justly you may blame yourself as the cause of it, yet, so far as it is suffering, *know you certainly that it is God's visitation:* bear it meekly, as the punishment of sin; bear it bravely, as the sign of discipline; and out of it, in his own time and way, God, if you look to Him and faint not, will surely, will infallibly work out good. Let us hear how it was with him whose wonderful conversion is before us.

Now there was a certain disciple in Damascus, by name Ananias. We know not how he came there; whether he was one of the converts of Pentecost, or one scattered on the persecution that arose about Stephen: this only we know, that he was placed there by God's Providence, *which ordereth all things both in heaven and earth,* to be ready for that blessed and honoured office now to be entrusted to him, as the Evangelist and the Baptist of the great Apostle St Paul. *And the Lord,* Jesus Christ Himself, *said to him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold,* it is *I, Lord. And the Lord said to him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight*—Christ knows the very names of our streets; yes, and the very house in which each one dwells—there is a sanctity therefore in human habitations, however humble, if the Lord vouch-

safes to notice and to name them from heaven —*and seek, in the house of Judas*—how would it startle us to hear Christ name the master of one of our houses, and specify the penitent or the saint who dwells therein!—one *Saul by name, of Tarsus.* I know no verse in Holy Scripture more pregnant with solemn and comforting truths than this. There is still to be seen in that ancient city of Damascus, so travellers say, just such a street, perhaps the very street here spoken of; a long straight street, running from the gate at which Saul probably entered, till the eye loses it in the distance: and here Jesus Christ names that street; names it from heaven; speaks of a particular house in it, just as insignificant, probably, as one of our own humble dwellings; calls the house by its master's name, and describes not only the name but the country of the stranger who was lying, blind and miserable, within its door. Surely He who thus spake then, and who is *the same yesterday and to-day and for ever,* has His eye and His ear still open towards us, marks our words and our deeds in the privacy of our dwellings, and could at any moment, if it so pleased Him, interpose in our lives with an authority which would constrain conviction.

If He does not; if we, more than ever, are to *walk* now *by faith not by sight,* at least, God helping us, let us not walk with Him by neither, neither by faith nor by sight! O let us treasure that which we know of Him, and behave towards Him, in our daily conversation, according to that which we say of Him in our worship!

Seek out in the house of Judas—such is the command—one called Saul, of Tarsus; *for, behold, he prayeth, and saw a man, Ananias by name, to have come in, and placed a hand upon him, that he might recover sight.* Thus to-day again, as before in the case of the Ethiopian convert, we mark the double preparation for the communication and for the reception of truth. Saul sees in a vision the man who is to minister to him; and the messenger is shown in a vision the work to which he is called. But there is an obstacle to be overcome.

But Ananias answered, Lord, I heard from many persons about this man, how many evils he did to Thy saints in Jerusalem: and hither he hath authority—he has a commission to this city —*from the chief priests, to bind all that call on Thy name.* A Christian is briefly characterized as *one who calls on,* who invokes, who calls in to

his aid, *the name of Christ;* that is, Christ in His revealed character, as the Son of God, the Saviour of sinners. Will that, my friends, describe our life? that it is a constant calling in of Jesus Christ to our help, and to our guidance, and to our protection, and to our consolation?

But the Lord said to him, Go; for this man is to me a vessel of selection, a chosen implement, *for the purpose of bearing my name,* of carrying the revelation of me, *in the presence of both Gentiles and kings, and sons of Israel;* in the presence that is of both classes of mankind, Gentiles with their rulers, as well as Israelites: *for I will indicate to him,* I will give him as it were a hint or glimpse of what is before him, enough at least to make him understand the nature of his mission, *how many things he must suffer in behalf of my name,* of me as revealed for the life and healing of the nations.

And Ananias went forth, and entered into the house; and after placing upon him his hands, said, Saul my *brother, the Lord hath sent me—Jesus, who appeared to thee in the way by which thou camest—that thou mightest recover sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. And immediately there fell off from his eyes*

as it were scales, and he recovered his sight, and arose, and was baptized.

It is now more than a century, since an English nobleman, well known to fame both in politics and literature, published a work on the *Conversion and Apostleship of St Paul,* avowing himself to have been brought back from infidelity to Christianity by the study of that event which has occupied our thoughts this night. Did he exaggerate its importance as a proof of the Gospel? There is scarcely one man in all history of whom we have so intimate a knowledge as of this blessed Apostle whose *wonderful conversion* is before us. We know what had been his education, what his prejudices were, what was the strength of his character, what the vehemence of his endeavours in the cause which he deemed to be that of truth and right. Was he a man likely to be influenced by a mere fancy, a chance dream, or (as some would persuade us) by a flash of lightning and a peal of thunder? Is that enough to account for so entire and so permanent a reversal of a man's whole career and aim of life? Must we not enquire what he himself said of an occurrence the consequences of which were so patent and so no-

torious? Again and again he refers to this event as an actual manifestation to him of the person of Jesus Christ. *Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?* is his question to those who would dispute his Apostleship. *Last of all, He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time,* is his last item in the catalogue of the appearances of the risen Jesus. In consequence of this belief, we see him addicting his life to the service of the Gospel which once he laboured to destroy. *We see him,* as it has been well said, *in the prosecution of this purpose, travelling from country to country, enduring every species of hardship, encountering every extremity of danger, assaulted by the populace, punished by the magistrates, scourged, beaten, stoned, left for dead; expecting, wherever he came, a renewal of the same treatment and the same dangers, yet, when driven from one city, preaching in the next; spending his whole time in the employment, sacrificing to it his pleasures, his ease, his safety; persisting in this course to old age, unaltered by the experience of perverseness, ingratitude, prejudice, desertion; unsubdued by anxiety, want, labour, persecutions; unwearied by long confinement, undismayed by the pro-*

spect of death. Such was St Paul... The question is, whether falsehood was ever attested by evidence like this. Falsehoods, we know, have found their way into reports, into tradition, into books; but is an example to be met with, of a man voluntarily undertaking a life of want and pain, of incessant fatigue, of continual peril; submitting to the loss of his home and country, to stripes and stoning, to tedious imprisonment, and the constant expectation of a violent death, for the sake of carrying about a story of what was false, and of what, if false, he must have known to be so?

For the present, we must be contented to have just seen the commencement of this life of self-devotion. We have seen what it was which started St Paul on this new career; what it was which turned him round from one direction to its very opposite; what it was which made him who entered Damascus to persecute stay there to preach. I believe it to be far more irrational to doubt his account of it than to receive it. I believe that Jesus Christ Himself did present Himself to the eye of Saul of Tarsus, as He exists now in heaven, as *He showed Himself alive* to His disciples *after His passion by many infallible proofs;*

that He spoke to him from heaven; that He promised him direction and guidance as to his future life; that He sent him that first instruction by the message of Ananias; that He communicated with him ever after, and from time to time more particularly, by the living agency of the Holy Ghost the Comforter; that He took him into His service, stood by him in danger, supported him in depression, gave him courage for his testimony, and (in every sense of the words) *made His own strength perfect in his weakness.* And if this be so; if there be nothing contrary to right reason in accepting these facts as true; then I would say that it is irrational to doubt, and madness to trifle with, the revelation of the Gospel. If St Paul's conversion (with its circumstances) is a fact, then there is such a Person as Jesus Christ our Lord, once crucified for our sins, then raised for our justification, to be our Advocate, our Mediator, our Intercessor, our High Priest with God. *See,* if this be so, *that ye refuse not Him that speaketh.*

The three words of the text will tell us what must be the firstfruits of this new conviction. *Behold, he prayeth!* So spake the

Lord to Ananias of him whom He was beginning to accredit as a chosen instrument. *Behold, he prayeth!* Had Saul of Tarsus never bent his knees in prayer before? Could he say, if this were so, that he had *lived in all good conscience before God* from his youth up? Had he never prayed seriously, earnestly, devoutly? Had he not prayed that morning when he went to the chief priests for his commission to persecute Christ's people? Had he not prayed during the days of his journey? on that memorable last day of his journey, when he drew near Damascus? Yes, my brethren: we do not read here any denial of it. But there were two or three points of difference between this and any prayer which he had before uttered.

First of all, it was the first prayer he had ever breathed with a knowledge of *the plague of his own heart.* It was the first time that he had seen himself as God saw him; as poor and destitute and miserable and blind; as a man needing a Sacrifice for his sins, a Mediator to intercede for him with God and a Divine Spirit to make his heart His temple. It was the first time that he had ever prayed as a penitent; as a man to whom all the past is but as a heap of worthless rags; as a man

whose whole fabric of self-righteousness has toppled down, and who desires henceforth to be nothing, and to have nothing, and to do nothing, but from God and with God and in God. *I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.* It was the first time—more than all else—that his prayer had ever made any mention, save in scorn and contempt, of that holy name in which alone a sinner can approach God. The name of the Lord Jesus Christ as necessary to salvation, as a Divine Person *whom truly to know is eternal life,* now first had place in his supplications. Doubtless with many bitter tears and many contrite confessions did he now bewail his past treatment of Jesus. Now his one cry was for that all-merciful Saviour to become his Propitiation and his Righteousness; the Guide of his way, and the Hope of his end. And therefore, if for no other reason, it could now be said of him, as never before, *Behold, he prayeth!*

How will our prayers bear these tests? Are they the prayers of the humble and the self-accusing? Are they the prayers of one *hungering and thirsting after* a *righteousness*

not of man but of God? Are they the prayers of one who knows but of one only *name under heaven, given among men, whereby he can be saved?* Try yourself by these tests, and God give us no rest until by His grace it can at last be said of us, in these senses, in heaven above, *Behold, he prayeth!*

LECTURE II.

THE NEW CONVERT.

ACTS IX. 26, 27.

They were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the Apostles.

HISTORY is made up of epochs and eras. An epoch is a stop or pause in the sequence of events; a marked moment, at which the reckoning of time rests and begins anew. An era is the interval between two epochs; the period, longer or shorter, which intervenes between two of those marked moments, of those milestones of history, by which the memory assists itself in keeping count of time.

Common history has its epochs, and sacred history has its epochs. The life of nations has its epochs, and the life of individuals has its epochs. Sometimes an epoch of individual life

is an epoch also of collective life, and a church or a nation dates by something which has happened to the life or the soul of a man.

In all good histories the epochs are strongly marked, and it is enough if the eras are more faintly indicated. Give the great turning-points of a life, its decisive impulses, its momentous changes, and we can almost fill it up for ourselves. Mark well the epochs, and the eras may mark themselves.

Thus it is in the best of all histories, those of the Bible. Last Sunday evening the events of three days fully occupied us: to-night we can pass lightly over the events of three years. That was an epoch: this is the beginning of an era. The Conversion of St Paul is a pause and a signal memorable for all time: the years which follow, while he is a learner even more than a teacher in Christ's school, need but a briefer notice, though one full of instruction for us who ponder it thoughtfully.

Saul arose from his three days' fast and blindness, and received Baptism forthwith at the hands (we may suppose) of his Evangelist, the humble but faithful Ananias. His faith, however recent, was beyond question. He did believe—well might he believe—in the risen

life of One who had spoken to him by his name from heaven. No exemption was either asked or given from the appointed mode of entrance into the Church of Christ. *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved:* the call of Christ Himself did not supersede or modify those two conditions.

If there be any one here present, not yet baptized, let me pray him or her to lose no time in seeking that ordinance which even a converted Apostle did not disdain.

And having received food he gained (*regained*) *strength. And he became with,* he joined the company of, *the disciples at Damascus during some days. And immediately in the synagogues he began to proclaim Jesus, that He is,* as being, *the Son of God.* First to the Jews; first in the synagogues, to which he had brought letters of authority to persecute; must he avow his new convictions. He had a recantation to make, as well as a testimony to bear. He had to say, and it must be said publicly, *This hand hath offended.* The natural character of St Paul aided this duty. He was a man of candour; a man of honest thoughts and frank words: and therefore he goes first to those with whom his new faith will gain for him no credit and no respect. Not

satisfied with making new friends, he must also explain himself to old ones: it may be that in doing this, he will win at least a few souls to Christ.

And all who heard were amazed, and said, Is not this he who made havoc at Jerusalem of those who call on this name, the name of Jesus, *and has come hither for this purpose, that he might bring them,* those who here call on this name, *bound to the chief priests? But Saul was more (increasingly) strengthened, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this is the Christ;* showing, as we shall often hereafter find him, from their own Scriptures, that all the prophecies of *Him that should come* meet and have their fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth.

And when many days were being fulfilled, were in course of completion, *the Jews took counsel to kill him. And their plot was learnt (discovered) by Saul. And they watched also the gates of the city, both by day and night, that they might kill him. But the disciples took him, and by night through the wall,* through the window, perhaps, of a house built into or overhanging the city wall, *they let him down, by lowering him in a basket.*

And on his arrival in Jerusalem, he endeavoured to join himself to the disciples; and they all feared him, as not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took hold of him, took him (as we say) by the hand, came to his aid, *and brought him to the Apostles; and related to them how on his journey he saw the Lord, and that He spoke to him, and how in Damascus he spoke boldly in the name of Jesus. And he was with them going in and going out at Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord; and he spake and disputed with the Hellenists,* the Greek-speaking Jews; *and they attempted to kill him. But the brethren, discovering it, brought him down to Cæsarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.*

There still remain one or two points of some interest in connection with this brief narrative.

St Paul himself adds to it some particulars in the 1st chapter of his Epistle to the Galatians.

(1) He states that three years elapsed between his conversion and this first visit to Jerusalem as a Christian. The history in the Acts speaks only of *many days.* But so consistent is Holy Scripture with itself, even when it appears at first sight to involve a contradiction, that we are able to show distinctly from a

passage in the Old Testament that the two forms of expression are in this instance perfectly consistent. In the 2nd chapter of the 1st Book of Kings, which contains the record of the beginning of the reign of Solomon, we read that Shimei, being warned by the king not to quit the city on pain of death, *dwelt in Jerusalem many days:* and then the next verse opens thus; *And it came to pass at the end of three years.* The expression *many days* is large enough to cover a period of three years. So it is here. St Luke says it was *many days* before St Paul went to Jerusalem; and St Paul himself tells us in one of his Epistles that it was three years. The two forms of expression are perfectly harmonious. Observe, my brethren —for indeed in these days we ought not to omit the warning—how easy it is for rashness and ignorance to find inconsistencies in Holy Scripture, which a calmer enquiry will entirely explain and remove. Learn a greater reverence for God's Holy Word; and be assured that in divine things reverence is but another name for reason.

(2) In the same Epistle St Paul mentions a journey into Arabia, of which we have here no notice. Before he went up to Jerusalem, he *went,* he says, *into Arabia, and returned again*

unto Damascus. During that three years' stay in Damascus he made a journey into Arabia. The region intended is differently understood: it may have been that Arabia which borders very closely upon Damascus itself. And the purpose of his journey is not mentioned; whether it was undertaken as a first missionary enterprise, or whether (as we would rather believe) it was designed to afford him a season of secluded meditation, greatly needed both for the review of the past, and for communion with his Lord in reference to the life now before him. St Luke leaves room, we have seen, for this journey, but does not mention it. His account of St Paul's life is full of omissions, except during that part of it in which he was himself with him. We are thankful for what he tells; and we are glad to supplement it from other sources; from the Epistles, that is to say, of St Paul himself.

(3) Once more, the same passage of St Paul's own writings tells us the length of his stay at Jerusalem on this occasion, and with which of the Apostles he then became acquainted. *Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him*

fifteen days. But other of the Apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God I lie not. Why this earnestness of expression? Because St Paul is vindicating in that passage the independence of his own Apostleship. He did not receive his Gospel at second hand: he was taught it by the Lord Himself. Doubtless, in the seclusion of his Arabian retirement, he was enlightened by direct communications of his Master's mind and will. It was three years before he saw one of the Apostles: when he at length visited Jerusalem, it was but for fifteen days, and during the whole of that visit he saw but Peter and James the Lord's brother. Thus were the words verified, *Paul, an Apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father who raised Him from the dead. I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me was not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

The twelve verses which form our text this evening must leave something behind them. God grant it!

1. We are told what St Paul's subject was

from the first day of his ministry. *Straightway he preached* CHRIST *in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. We preach not ourselves,* he said some years afterwards, *but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. Christ our Subject;* that ought to be the motto of all preachers. St Paul never found it necessary to change his subject. It lasted him for his life. But what was it in his hands, on his lips? Was it the dry monotonous repetition of one doctrine—of the truth of the Atonement through the one Sacrifice? Was his preaching the perpetual harping upon one string, without variety and without life? Need I ask this question of any reader of his Epistles? Well may he speak there of *the unsearchable riches of Christ;* of *all the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in Christ bodily.* He found it so, evidently, to himself. He found in Christ an inexhaustible wealth of comfort, of sympathy, of help, of strength; an absolutely unlimited supply of grace in the present, and of hope for the longest future. And this was what he sought to communicate. Like one of his fellow Apostles, he could say, *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us;*

and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. That is true preaching; the endeavour to unfold and to divulge a reality first felt and prized within; the endeavour to call others in to share a happiness, or to join in a pursuit of happiness, felt to be the only restingplace of the life and of the soul of man. And can we not all say *this*—that we do want such a restingplace; and that we do believe it to be, could we but reach it, only in the knowledge and love of God through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? This was St Paul's subject when *he preached Christ.* May it be more and more—and O that it might be so for the same reason—our subject and your delight!

2. In its simple fact he could do this at once: he could *straightway preach Christ in the synagogues, that He was the Son of God.* He could tell, as a matter of plain proof, of direct evidence, that he, he himself, who had come out, on this occasion, to persecute and to destroy, had been arrested by a stronger hand as he approached the city, and constrained to confess that One whom he had scouted as a crucified and dead man was indeed living in the fulness of strength at the right hand of

God in heaven. But we are not therefore to suppose that St Paul's knowledge was at once complete, or his spiritual life perfected. We read in the Gospel history, in a higher example still, the need of delay and of preparation before the exercise of a sacred calling. And we attach, in this respect, great value to that addition which St Paul himself makes to the narrative as here written; namely, his journey into Arabia, and the interval of three years between his conversion and his return to Jerusalem. Doubtless it was during this interval that he both learned and suffered many of those things of which he has left the record in his Epistles. Many of those *revelations of the Lord,* of which he there speaks as made personally to himself, were no doubt communicated then. And may it not have been, that that deep experience of the conflict with indwelling sin, which he details so strikingly in the 7th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, was then especially gained? It is a great error, and one pregnant with mischief, to suppose that an Apostle, because he was specially called, and specially equipped for his high office, was therefore raised out of the ordinary experiences of the Christian life within; was exempted

from the trials, and excused the struggles, which other men endure in rising from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. This notion deprives us of more than half of the comfort and benefit to be derived from their words and from their history. They are no longer men of flesh and blood, men of like passions with us, able to feel with us in our sorrows, and in the same degree to encourage us by their victory. And the same error runs on into a province in which it is not a mere loss of comfort, but a grave and sometimes fatal deception. Men talk as if conversion were the whole of a Christian life; as if a person, brought to see the guilt and the sin of his doings, and to seek forgiveness and cleansing in the blood of Christ, were thenceforth not only safe from condemnation but secure from sin; called not only to trust but to rest; not only to look to Christ for all, but even to dispense with that looking. We all know what has again and again come of this; in the sincere and honest-hearted, distress, disappointment, and perhaps despair; in the less scrupulous, carelessness, presumption, at last a hardened heart and a seared conscience. Conversion is a great thing; God's

best gift to His sinful creatures: but let conversion itself be tried by these tests: first, is it the commencement of a change? and secondly, is it the commencement of a progress? A conversion which begins and ends with itself lacks every sign of that which Scripture so designates. A conversion trusted in as a security for salvation, usurps the very place of the Saviour Himself, and becomes at once a delusion and a snare. A conversion which forgets and loses itself in Christ; which brings a man to the cross, and teaches him to abide there; which brings a man to the risen Saviour, and teaches him to draw from Him daily life and daily strength through the Holy Ghost; is a blessing indeed above all price; a blessing for which there shall be everlasting thanks and praise in heaven.

3. How life-like are the lessons of Scripture! Which of us cannot understand that shrinking (of which the text tells) from the new convert, in the recollection of his former deeds? *He assayed to join himself to the disciples:* he felt himself, in heart and soul, one with them; he longed to exchange with them that sympathy which only Christians know, and which it is misery to them to be constrained to hide; he

longed, too, to tell them his bitter self-reproaches for injuries once done to them, and to speak of that longsuffering love of Christ which had spared and sought out and reconciled even him, the blasphemer and the persecutor, yea (in his own judgment at least) the very chief of sinners. *But they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.* It was natural: the memory of their beloved Stephen at whose cruel death this man had assisted, and of many others, hunted down by his relentless rage against the Gospel, and compelled or at least tempted to blaspheme, could not but rise within them at the sight of him, and make it difficult to believe that the professed change was real. These things, in the retrospect, turn to the Gospel for a testimony: the thought of what Saul was, only increases the miracle of what he is: such a change, so thorough, so astounding, is one of the standing evidences of Jesus and the Resurrection. But at the time it was hard to credit: *they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.* This was the punishment of long hostility to the truth and to the Saviour. Doubtless he bore it meekly: doubtless he confessed that it was his due. But ought not the

record of that suspicion, of that coldness towards a holy and blessed saint on the ground of what he once was, to make us all fearful of discouraging and daunting the nascent faith of others? Let me speak plainly; and let me speak especially to the young. Some of you are thrown together in large bodies; associated in trade or manufacture, where there is sometimes no eye over you to check the freest expression of thought and feeling: and you know that, in these days more especially, such freedom is sure to run on into licence; you hear things said against Christ and against God's Word, which are deeply painful to the believing; and you have found by experience that argument on such subjects seldom succeeds in convincing, and more often tends to provoke to more ungodliness: you have learned therefore to keep silence; to preserve your opinion and your faith by meditation rather than by controversy: and amongst other securities against being shaken in your religion, you have adopted that of considerable isolation; you keep to yourselves, you avoid needless communication, you repel the advances of unbelieving or doubtful men. It is hard to blame you. You have a difficult and trying part to play: God help

you to play it well and wisely! But remember one thing: there may be amongst you, though you know it not, men whose minds are more than half open to a better influence; men who through weakness only, not from deliberate choice of evil, are falling into the snare of the devil; men who, whatever they may say or not say in the company of the wicked, have yet a misgiving in their hearts as to the life they lead, and an openness to conviction as to the very truth with which they trifle. Take heed not to *quench the smoking flax* by your treatment of such a condition. Take heed not to be blind and not to be indifferent to the existence of such cases. If not yet disciples, these men are at least among those for whom Christ died: they have a claim therefore upon your assistance in turning to Him: and it would be a cruel selfishness if you allowed them to fall utterly from Him, from a fear lest perhaps they should hinder or distress you in your own faith and service.

4. Take then to your heart the example here presented of the conduct of the faithful Barnabas towards a still mistrusted disciple. We heard of him in an earlier chapter as receiving his name from the Apostles, in token, no doubt, of something in his character which

suited the title of *a son of consolation.* How well does he here justify that appellation! We know not whether he was previously acquainted with him whom he here befriends. Saul was of Tarsus in Cilicia, and Barnabas of the not very distant island of Cyprus; so that there may have existed some such earlier intimacy, as should explain the one acting (on two occasions in this history) as the helper and introducer of the other. But this we know, that Barnabas was a Christian man: he had drunk deeply of that Holy Spirit which is love, long-suffering, goodness, as well as peace and joy and gentleness. He knew the whole history of the new disciple: he knew how he had seen the Lord in the way, and how the Lord had spoken to him, and how Saul had at once avowed boldly the strength and certainty of his new convictions. And therefore he lost no time in mediating between him and those who doubted him. He brought him to the Apostles, and declared to them his history. Thus, like one of the original Apostles, St Andrew, he acted as the encourager and the helper of another in coming to Jesus. It is a blessed office, my brethren, this of the peacemaker; more especially when the peace made is not of earth only; when it affects the

soul also, whether in its dealings with Christ Himself, or in its relations to Christ's servants. I could desire nothing better for one of those whose present difficulties I have been describing, than that he might be the means of clearing the path for another, weaker perhaps and less resolute than himself, towards Christ and towards heaven. *Look not every man*, in this sense, *on his own things: but every man also on the things of others.*

And is not this, my brethren, the very office of some of those who hear? What is the aim of a Visitor of the poor, in its highest aspect? Is it not this—to *bring to the Apostles*—in other words, to bring to Christ Himself—those who, but for such aid, might be lost sight of, might be left in disregard, in suspicion, in darkness? How often has the work of Christian charity been privileged to perform this highest office! How often has the ministry of the body gone on, under God's blessing, to be a ministry of the soul! Many a man has been first drawn to Jesus by finding himself cared for, in bodily things, by one on whom he felt himself to have no claim; by one whose service to him he saw to be wholly disinterested, wholly prompted by Christian love. God has knit together in a

wonderful manner His various gifts of grace. He puts it into the heart of a Christian man or a Christian woman to undertake this ministry to the poor. He leads others to give of their abundance, that the hand of the visitant may not be empty. He guides the steps to some poor man's home, where there is one who deems himself forsaken, and has begun to acquiesce in that neglect which is nevertheless paralyzing to the soul. In the surprise of this new solicitude, he begins to ask himself what is this motive which has wrought in a stranger's heart to do him this service. And he can assign no reason for it but this only; that there is a power in Christ's Gospel, which is mighty to overcome sloth and self, and to seek out, in the Saviour's name, those who were lost and sunk in sin. Then the heart is opened to attend to the things spoken, and the sleeping soul awakened from the fatal lethargy which bound it. This has been: God grant it may yet again be amongst us! A Christian care for the body may be made available to save the soul. It is thus that God's works are wrought below. It is thus that His grace penetrates into new homes, making men's hearts *willing in the day of His power.* In every such sowing, beloved brethren, expect

the reaping; and pray, as you give, that the highest of all blessings may accompany your offering, guiding it not only to the healing of the body but to the saving of the soul!

LECTURE III.

QUIET TIMES.

ACTS IX. 31.

Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified: and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

THE right use of quiet times is a great secret of Christian living. Human life is made up of alternations of storm and calm, of trouble and rest. It is so with individual life, and it is so with collective life; the life of a nation, or the life of a Church.

The earlier part of this chapter indicated a time of trouble for the Christian community. Persecution was hot against them: *even unto strange cities* they were followed by threats of

violence. But now the chief persecutor has himself felt the force of truth; *a stronger than the strong man armed* has interposed, and he who was entering Damascus to make havoc of Christ's people is *now preaching the faith which once he destroyed.*

Other causes may have contributed to the change indicated in the text. It is said that the Roman Emperor Caligula, who in the year 38 succeeded Tiberius, was making an impious attempt to place his own image in the temple at Jerusalem; and that the attention of the Jewish authorities was wholly occupied with plans for frustrating his design. They had no time to persecute. Thus even *the fierceness of man* may *turn to God's praise,* and *the remainder of wrath* be *restrained* by His overruling hand.

The church then throughout the whole of Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being edified, gradually built up and strengthened; *and walking by the fear of the Lord,* as their rule and direction, *and by the encouragement of the Holy Spirit,* by His comforting and quickening influence, both in the hearts of the disciples and in the ministry of the Apostles, *was multiplied.* There were *added to*

the Church daily, not in Jerusalem only, but through the length and breadth of the land, *such as should be saved.*

And the sacred history goes on to tell how particularly by the ministry of one man, the blessed Apostle St Peter, this enlargement of the Church in Palestine was effected. He made it his business to go hither and thither, *strengthening all the disciples.* Specimens of his ministry are given, in the two cases of Lydda and Joppa. In each of these a signal miracle attested the grace given to him. At Lydda there was a man, who had lain for eight years on a couch paralyzed, and who, at the authoritative word of Peter, *Jesus Christ healeth thee: arise, and make thy own bed,* arose straightway, and contributed largely, by the notoriety of his miraculous cure, to the spread of the Gospel, both in his own town, and in the adjacent plain of Sharon.

At Joppa there was a Christian woman, of eminent piety; her life one continued succession of charitable and beneficent deeds. *She was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.* With her own hands she ministered to the bodily wants of the poor. She busied herself in providing clothing for such as were

in need. What a simple and instructive picture of the Christian women of all times! She lived in a place not larger probably at any time than many an English town: and there was nothing magnificent, in any sense, in her deeds of charity: but with God great and small are names unknown, and it has pleased Him to leave on record for all ages the history of this humble yet bright example. Let no Christian woman think for one moment that her charities are unnoticed or unregarded in heaven. If they spring out of genuine love, first to Christ and then to His people, they are all written there, though it is neither needful for others nor good for themselves, that they be paraded in the book of the Church below.

At last the day of death arrived. *She fell sick, and died.* The usual offices were paid to the lifeless corpse; and then it was laid out in an upper chamber. But it pleased our Lord Jesus Christ to show Himself in this instance by the agency of another, as before on earth by His own, *the Lord of life and death.* The disciples at Joppa heard that a holy Apostle was within ten miles of them at Lydda; and whether from a desire for his comfort at a time of sorrow, or from a vague undefined hope

that he might even remove the cause of that sorrow, they sent him an urgent message, *not to delay to come to them.* He obeyed the summons; not knowing (it may be) the precise work before him, but possessing that grace of which we have lately spoken, *the preparation (readiness) of the Gospel of peace,* and desiring to lose no opportunity of applying his Master's hand, whether in its consolation or in its strength.

He arrived in Joppa. And there a sad scene presented itself. There was the poor lifeless body, made ready for its burial; and the room in which it lay was thronged with mourning friends, all recounting what they had lost, and showing the practical proofs of piety in garments made for the poor by those busy industrious hands which are now (as they deem) for ever still in death. The Spirit of the Lord came upon the Apostle, and suggested to him a miracle above miracles; the restoration of this loved disciple to a longer life in the body. *He put them all out,* desiring, like his Master before him, an entire calm from distracting sights and sounds, that he might bring together every energy of his soul for that wrestling with God in prayer, which could alone give

strength for a work so stupendous. Then *he knelt down, and prayed.* At last *he turned to the body,* and calling the departed person by name bade her (in one brief decisive word) *arise. She opened her eyes* once more upon the familiar scenes around, saw her restorer, and was by him *presented alive* to the little community which was bewailing her. Well can we understand that, when this *became known throughout Joppa, many believed on the Lord;* and thus a large work, both of preaching and guiding, was opened before the Apostle, which constrained him to *abide many days in Joppa* in that humble dwelling from which he was to be called forth in God's Providence to a yet more significant use of the keys of the heavenly kingdom.

I have sought, my brethren, to lay before you in one view the inspired instruction here given, as to the use of a season of tranquillity such as that which lasts, for us, by God's blessing, all our life long, and which may still continue—we know not—as it has still continued from generation to generation. Whether indeed there will ever again be a period of actual persecution for the truth's sake, it is not given us to know. *The offence of the cross* has not

ceased, within or without: it is in us all, as well as around us, still. But whatever contempt may be secretly entertained for those who truly believe and preach the Gospel, there is at all events no absolute persecution. What there is of persecution is within doors; from *foes of a man's own household,* reproved by his example and impatient of his scrupulosity. As a Church, as professors of the Gospel of Christ, we are in peace: no man oppresses and *no man forbids* us. Let us see then what we ought to be; what is the proper character and the proper work of a Church or a Congregation thus living in *quietness from fear of evil.*

The churches had peace: how did they use it? Did it make them indolent? unfruitful? unfaithful? inconsistent? quarrelsome?

Two things are said of them: first, they were *edified;* secondly, they were *multiplied.*

1. *Edified.* The figure is taken from the rise and progress of a building.

(1) The whole Church, of all lands and times, is a building; one building; planned by one Architect, carried on by one Builder, designed for one end, to be the eternal habitation of God Himself when at last (as a Prophet has written) *the headstone is brought forth*

with shoutings. It is not easy to apprehend this unity. Only He who *sees the end from the beginning* can see the Universal Church as one. But the thought, however faintly conceived, is full of comfort. It puts each one of us in his place; it shows us how small is the place of each one; and yet also it shows us that each one has his place, and that, if the place of any one be not filled, there is a chink, a fissure, a blank, be it ever so small, in the finished work. Is not that honour enough, and importance enough, for a creature and a sinner? Does it not say, loudly enough, and also persuasively enough, to each one of us, See that thy place in the universal temple be not a blank, or worse?

(2) Again, the Church of each land and of each age—let me say (for the time is short) the Church of each town in each generation —is a building. Yes, it may be but a fragment, but one corner, or one buttress, or one pinnacle, of the Universal Church; but you all know how any building, how this Church in which we are assembled, would look if one buttress fell or if one pinnacle were dislodged from it; and therefore you will not count it a small thing if some such humble position as that,

or a position humbler still, be all that belongs to this our little community as it exists this year or this day in the sight of an all-seeing and all-regarding God. I say that this congregation of ours is a building: and is it then being *edified,* that is, built up? is it making any progress? is it rising, in solidity, in unity, in beauty? is it giving signs, more and more, of its destination as a habitation of God, as a place in which Christ Himself is to dwell and to walk, to be adored and beloved, throughout eternity? God grant it! We want more amongst us still of this collective feeling, of this sense of union and of unity, as a Church: if we would be *edified,* we must cherish it.

(3) And then, yet once more, each human soul, taken separately, is a building. *Your body,* St Paul says, addressing individual Christians, *is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God.* Each one of us is a building. How much we lose sight of this! living from day to day without one thought of the progress and of the unity of that personal being, which must be fit, when we die—if we would not be for ever miserable—to be God's abode, God's dwellingplace, God's temple, through an eternal age! What a question is it, for

each one, how is that building which is I myself, getting on? Are the foundations deeply and soundly laid, in the faith of Christ my Saviour? Is the superstructure rising day by day, gradually, regularly, quietly, yet consciously, perceptibly, visibly? In other words, Am I growing in grace? more and more prevailing over evil tempers, and sinful passions, and carnal lusts? better able to do as unto God the work which He has given me, and to overcome, in the strength of God, the temptations which assail me? Whose building is not either standing still, disfigured by unsightly materials, or actually unsound and rotten in its foundations? Times of tranquillity ought to be times of edifying: alas! too often they are times of suspended energy and of deep defilement.

2. Another thing is said of the congregations here described. They were edified: they were also *multiplied.*

A time of peace ought to be a time of outward as well as inward progress; a time of extension as well as a time of edification. It was so of old. *Believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.* How is it now? How is it with the out-

skirts of the Church, with lands in which only Missions can operate? Is there zeal at home, in founding and in reinforcing such institutions? Is there a real interest in the reception of tidings from the Church's workmen abroad, as to the success of their labours? Alas! you know, my brethren, how impossible it is to gain even a hearing for such matters. You know, that, with much philanthropy, there is little Gospel zeal amongst us; that, where a thousand pounds can be gathered for a work of charity, it is hard to collect ten for a work of piety; hard to gain any response for a call to aid the Church's Missions, or to extend into new regions the knowledge of a Lord and Saviour. The Church is scarcely in this sense *multiplying:* new lands are not being evangelized; the Gospel net is scarcely spreading itself at all over the distant, the untracked waters.

And at home, how is it? Here, in this town, is the Church at all *multiplying?* I trust so; but these results are not wrought without means, without honest and hearty efforts on the part of those whose own hearts are first won for Christ. Can we point, by tens, or by fives, or by units, to new persons brought to

be worshippers, and brought to be communicants, by agencies now working amongst us? Let us pray for this, and let us labour too; not for our own glory, but for God's; not in our own strength, but in Christ's only; that individual victories may be won for Him on His enemy's soil, and that this sign of vitality may be largely vouchsafed to us, that the Church which is Christ's body is not being edified only, but multiplied!

We are not left in the dark as to how this may be done; what influences are mighty, through God, to this enlargement of his Son's fold. The Church multiplies, by its own progress in two things; *walking* (1) *in the fear of the Lord, and* (2) *in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.*

(1) *The fear of the Lord* is the fear of Christ. More than once we have been led to this topic. Our Lord Jesus Christ deserves not our love only, but our fear also. Does that seem strange to any one? Is He not our *merciful and faithful High Priest, ever living to make intercession for us?* Is He not described as *the Propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world?* Blessed be God, the words are His own; written for our comfort, and for our

attraction towards Him. But they are not written to encourage us in evil. They are not written to make us careless about sin. They would not be God's words for us, if that were their effect. I suppose there is nothing which so solemnizes and so awes the mind of man, as the thought of an absolutely disinterested and an absolutely unbounded love. It says of itself, *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?* The greatness of the salvation is the measure of the danger.

To *trample under foot the Son of God, to count the blood of the covenant, wherewith we are sanctified, an unholy thing,* must indeed be of all crimes the blackest and the most fatal. And that is what men do every day for want of this very fear of which the text speaks; the fear of the Lord, of Jesus Christ. Let us learn to regard Him as not only dying for sin but abhorring sin; hating it with a perfect hatred, as warring against that will of the Father which is man's deliverance and sanctification. My brethren, it is a dangerous thing when there is a prevalent laxity, in a congregation, or in a house, or in a soul, as to this fear of Christ; when all is resolved into that sort of love (falsely so called) which is mere

easiness and weakness; when the whole of religion is resolved into feeling, and that feeling not one of reverent awe, but of presumptuous trust. To walk in the fear of Christ is one half of Christianity.

(2) And then, so walking, there is room also for the other characteristic; *and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.* These things are given in explanation of the churches multiplying; given, that is, in illustration of the effect produced upon bystanders and lookers on. To see a Christian fear Christ, tends to multiply the Church. There is an awe about it, which is no repulsion. To see that a man lives every day in the remembrance of his Saviour; gives up what He forbids, loves what He commands, sets Him always before him, is jealous for His honour and personally seeks His glory; this, if in one sense alarming, is in another winning too; it is marvellously impressive, in a world like ours, so selfseeking and so Godless, to see a man really living for another, to see a man really *looking not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at the things which are unseen and eternal.* But if, in addition to this walking in the fear of Christ, there be also a visible walking in the

comfort of the Holy Ghost; if a man is not watchful only but happy too; if it is evident that he *has meat to eat which man knows not of*, and a spring of life within with which no stranger can intermeddle; it is scarcely possible that this should have no effect, under God, in multiplying His Churches: we may doubt whether any man ever so lived, without having been the means of adding to the Lord at least one soul that should be saved. *The comfort of the Holy Ghost* is not a mere soothing influence within; it is a cheering power without also. The same word is rendered by *comfort* and by *exhortation*. The *son of consolation* is a *son* also *of exhortation*. The comforts of God are all powers too. God comforts by cheering on; by encouraging to action; by giving a new impulse to the life within, so that it shall spring forth to higher hopes, nobler efforts, and greater attainments. Therefore he who walks in the comfort of the Holy Ghost is evermore a partaker of that Spirit which is one *of power* as well as '*of love and of a sound mind*.' We may try the reality of our comfort, by this one test: does it stir me up and spur me on to action? does it make me vigorous as well as peaceful? does it say, in the depths

of my soul, not, *Rest from work*, but, *Rest in working?* If the latter, it is, we may humbly hope, of the nature of that comfort in which when the Churches walked, they were multiplied as well as edified.

3. Finally, we shall regard a time of outward tranquillity as one peculiarly favourable to the exercise of Christ's ministry. And when I speak of Christ's ministry, I desire to include in that description not only an official but a personal service; quite as much the ministry of her whose humble leisure was filled with almsdeeds for Christ's poor, as of him who *passed through all quarters* ready to heal the sick or to reanimate the dead. How ungrateful is it, if, because God casts our lot in quiet times, we are to enjoy a selfish and thankless ease, doing nothing for Him and nothing for our brethren; nothing to spread the knowledge of Christ, or to draw others, at our own doors, in our own homes, to follow Him! What are we doing—let each one ask himself, let each one ask herself, What am I doing—to show my thankfulness for the blessings and the hopes of a Christian? And if any heart be aroused by these reflections to a sense of idleness and of ingratitude, remember that he

must be a drowsy and negligent shepherd who cannot find you work to do, much or little, for his Master's sheep that are (all around us) scattered abroad, and that no comfort could be greater to those who here *watch for your souls*, however imperfectly, *as they that must give account*, than to see one and another coming to them for work to be done for Christ; nor any hope more certain, than that the desire for Christian work will be always twice blessed, blessed as much to those who do it as to those in whose behalf and in whose service it is done.

What am I doing, such is the question, to show my thankfulness for the blessings and hopes of a Christian? If nothing else, am I at least caring for the poor? There are those who feel themselves unequal to any other, any more directly spiritual source. Then let them begin with this. Let them, in the privacy of home, work, like this Christian woman, for Christ's poor. Instead of saying, all through life, to the needy, *Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled*, let them see what little can be done, in their own kitchen or by their own hand's toil, to procure, for a few at least, *those things which are needful for the body*. And let them

consecrate every such offering by humble self-abasing prayers to the Lord Jesus Christ. Let their own hope and faith rest firmly on Him. So when they come to die, if not mourned, like her of whom we have read to-night, by the tears of many who have here lived by their bounty, at least they may have Him with them whose love can illuminate even death and the grave, and whose voice shall at last be heard in the darkness and stillness of each separate sepulchre, saying, *Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead:* yea, *come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

Grant this, we beseech Thee, O merciful Father, through Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Redeemer.

LECTURE IV.

THE FIRST GENTILE CHRISTIAN.

ACTS X. 15.

What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

THE history which comes before us to-night may be regarded as the prelude to the ministry of St Paul. He was to be the Apostle to the Gentiles; and the conversion of the first Gentile is our subject this evening. St Paul was not the agent in that conversion. He was still at Tarsus, his native place, making preparation for that life of labour in Christ's service, which will soon occupy our chief attention in the study of this Book. God works as He will, and by whom He will: Paul or Cephas, Paul or Apollos, it matters not: all have one end, each has his own work, and God alone gives the increase. It was well, too, that Peter, the Apostle of the circumcision, should be thus

early committed to the evangelization of the Gentiles. There must be no schism in the body: it must not be said, even falsely, that Paul and Peter had different opinions on the question whether in Christ Jesus there shall be henceforth circumcision or uncircumcision, one God of the Jews and another of the Gentiles. Truth is one; and the Apostles of the truth must be one also.

We read in the Gospels of a centurion whose faith put to shame that of the children of the kingdom. The first Gentile convert was in like manner a centurion; an officer in the Roman army; resident at Cæsarea, the head-quarters of the Roman government in Palestine. A soldier may be a good man. Some of God's most eminent servants have been officers in the army. The centurion in the Gospel drew an argument for faith in Christ from his own experience of discipline. If I, a mere man, can say to a soldier under me, *Go,* or *Come,* or *Do this or that,* and be sure of his obedience; how much more can this Person, in whom God is, say to a fever or a palsy, *Depart,* or, *Be healed,* at His pleasure. It was a just argument. The habit of subordination, and the habit of command, acquired in military service, has often

been an aid, under God's blessing, to the regulation of the life without, and to the disciplining of the soul within. It was to a man in this position and of this character, that it pleased God to send, first of the Gentiles, the gift of eternal life.

The description of his character is remarkable.

(1) He was already *a devout man, and one that feared God.* He was acquainted with the true God: he was no idolater: he had learned, perhaps from his residence in Judea, to fear and to worship one God only, his Maker and Preserver and Benefactor. In this sense he was a proselyte; a proselyte of the gate, as it was called, though not admitted by circumcision into a closer connection with Israel, or into the higher position of what was termed a proselyte of righteousness.

(2) His influence was all for good. *He feared God, with all his house.* He took care to regulate his household well, and to instruct them in his own religion. He did not, as is too common even among professed Christians, wrap himself up in selfish security, and take no concern for the safety of those around and beneath him. His religion was a family as well as personal

religion. *He feared God with all his house.* And therefore, when he wanted a fit messenger on a religious errand, he had no difficulty in finding *a devout soldier* among *them that waited on him continually.* It is a great blessing, and it might be a common blessing, to have a pious as well as faithful servant, to whom even the affairs of the soul might on occasion be no secret.

(3) And it was not only within doors that his influence wrought. His charity, like his piety, began at home, but it did not end there. He *gave much alms to the people.* Though he seems to have been among strangers, only quartered in Cæsarea on military duty, yet he did not make that circumstance an excuse for disregarding the wants that surrounded him. He cared for the poor. He not only sanctified his own comforts by thanksgiving, but also acted upon the principle laid down by Him whom as yet he knew not, *But rather give alms of such things as ye have, and behold, all things are clean unto you.*

(4) In the last place, the secret of his life is disclosed to us; how it was that he was thus reverent, and thus exemplary, and thus charitable. He *prayed to God alway.* He was

continually praying. Praying, doubtless, for more light; praying also for grace to act faithfully according to the light he had. And therefore to him the promise was soon to be fulfilled, *To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundance.*

On one of these occasions of prayer, during the ninth hour of the day, three o'clock in the afternoon, he was surprised by the visit of an Angel, calling him by his name, and telling him that *his prayers and his alms had gone up,* like the sweet savour of a sacrifice, *for a memorial before God.* It is a remarkable and a beautiful expression. The prayers and the alms of Cornelius had a record, as it were, in heaven. It is like the saying of the prophet Malachi, *Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name.* The prayers and the alms of the humble and waiting soul are entered in the book of remembrance which is written in heaven.

And entered there not as an idle or a boastful record, but as a plea for more light and clearer guidance. The direction sent to Cor-

nelius, as the reward (we may truly say) of his consistency and devotion, is, that he send to Joppa to summon to him a new teacher, *who shall tell him what he ought to do; tell him words,* as we read afterwards, *whereby he and all his house shall be saved.* God's *comforts* are all *encouragements* too; not a mere soothing or satisfying, but rather a wakening up and an urging on. So it was here. God rewards by improving; shows His love by adding light.

Cornelius lost no time in acting upon this direction. Like Saul of Tarsus, he *was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.* As soon as the Angel departed, *he called two of his household servants,* and that *devout soldier* of whom we have already spoken, made them acquainted with the cause, and sent them off to Joppa; a journey of about five and thirty miles.

But we have often had occasion to notice how God, designing to send one of His servants on a special mission, first prepares and instructs his mind for a work to which otherwise he might have felt repugnance. It was so with Philip and the Ethiopian: it was so with Ananias and Saul: it is so again with Peter and Cornelius. Peter was a man full of prepossessions and prejudices on the subject of religious

differences. *The middle wall of partition* between Jew and Gentile was for him an impassable barrier: he could not imagine a Gentile being brought into God's Church otherwise than through the sacrament of circumcision. Nothing less than a direct intimation of the will of God could suffice to make him obey the call of one who was no Israelite. We may blame him; we may call it bigoted and narrow-minded; but perhaps before we close the book this evening we may have seen that, without his excuse, we are all too ready to imitate his example.

The God whom we serve is a considerate as well as a compassionate God. He takes thought for His servants. He does not suffer them to be surprised into disobedience. If He is about to send them an unexpected and an improbable commission, He sends them first a notice of it and a key to its meaning. Thus it was here. The men sent by Cornelius were approaching the end of their journey, about noon on the day following that of his vision, when Peter went up to the housetop for a season of seclusion and prayer. There he was, alone upon the flat Eastern roof, looking only upon sea and sky, his mind filled with those holy and magnificent

thoughts which are so congenial to the contemplation of those two grandest features of nature. As time went on, he became conscious of hunger; and while food was preparing for him, *he fell into a trance.* In his trance he saw a vision. From the open sky there came down the appearance of a great sheet-like vessel, let down by its four corners till it rested upon the earth. As he gazed upon its contents, he saw all manner of beasts and birds and creeping things, herded indiscriminately within it. At the same moment a voice came to him, bidding him, in his hunger, to *kill and eat.* The Apostle remonstrated against such a breach of the Levitical Law. *Not so, Lord,* he pleaded: lay not upon my conscience such a burden: *for I never* so transgressed the Mosaic statutes as to *eat anything common (defiled) or unclean.* But the voice replied, *What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.* Three times this strange scene was repeated; the same command, the same remonstrance, and the same reply; and then all disappeared, and Peter was left to muse alone upon the purport of the vision. While he was thus engaged, the Holy Spirit announced to him that it was but the prelude to a call of duty. Three men were already seeking him;

he must arise, and go down, and set out with them on a journey, assured that He, the Spirit of God, had sent them.

It was even so. He found at the gate the messengers of Cornelius, and on hearing from them a brief account of their errand—how Cornelius a centurion, a just and God-fearing man, bearing a high character among his Jewish neighbours, had been warned of God by a holy Angel to send for him to his house and to hear words from him—he at once invited them in, entertained them for the night, and on the morrow started with them for Cæsarea.

The history is full of lessons for us: some of them we have already indicated.

1. There is the duty of one who is as it were *watching for the morning;* waiting for a clearness of faith and hope which as yet he has not. *Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it. Whereunto we have already attained, let us walk by it:* and whatsoever we lack, whether of knowledge or of comfort, *God,* in His own good time, *shall reveal even this unto us. In the way of Thy judgements have we waited for Thee. If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.* Cornelius used his light, and prayed for more. Cornelius was already just, already

reverent, already a worshipper with his house, already liberal and charitable, above all, he was already earnest and constant in prayer, before he knew anything of the salvation which is in Christ Jesus. What, my brethren, are we who know? Which of his characteristics does not condemn us? *Prophets and righteous men* of old *desired to see the things which we see:* we see them, and heed them not. Which of us carries his household with him in his fear of God? Which of us *disperses abroad and gives to the poor?* Which of us—for that is the test of tests—prays to God always? Alas, while we are as we are, the light that is around cannot shine within, and the eye that should see it is gradually losing its power.

2. But, while the example of Cornelius thus condemns, let us not lose the recollection that he still needed a conversion. How can men read this history, and talk of it as the record of the first Gentile conversion, and yet go their way to think a Gospel faith needless? Which of them would not count a Cornelius of this day safe for heaven? Which of them would not consider that a just man, and a godly man, and a charitable man, and a devout man, was all, perhaps more than all, that can

be required for salvation? It is becoming the fashion now to claim what is called a wide latitude for opinion and doctrine, and to say that, if a man only walks according to the light he has—or rather, if a man only lives morally and does his duty—we need not trouble ourselves about his faith: *he can't be wrong, whose life is in the right.* We must indeed think the conversion of Cornelius a strange misnomer; we must indeed regard the whole record—the visit of the Angel, the mission to Peter, the vision from the housetop, and the double journey—a mere waste of strength and trouble, needless for its object and unworthy of God; if we do not simply believe that *there is salvation in none other* than Christ; *that there is none other name under heaven, given among men,* save His alone, *whereby we must be saved.* Not for the sake of judging others, but certainly for our own warning and quickening in the life of God, do we need, all of us, to remember that he whose conversion is before us was no scoffer, no profane person, no libertine, no profligate, but one who already *feared God with all his house, gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.* Do I address any to-night—alas! *it must needs be*—who are practically resting for

their salvation upon a moral or at least a decent life? men of middle age perhaps, immersed in life's toils and cares; or men past middle age, sinking into the dulled perceptions and blunted enjoyments of the old; but who, in either case, have no real hold upon the revelations of the Gospel, no lively sense of their need of a Saviour's blood, no true habitual communion with God their Father through the Holy Spirit? My brethren—I would say, with all earnestness and with all tenderness also, to such men—think of God sending a holy Apostle to the blameless and exemplary Cornelius, to tell him words whereby he and all his house might be saved. Does not this of itself teach you, that a man's soul, even a blameless man's soul, needs saving, saving from sin and death, and saving in Christ only? Whatever you are, you can scarcely be a better man than Cornelius: and yet he needed Christ, and the knowledge of Christ, and the possession of Christ's Spirit, to save his soul. The same word which was miraculously sent to him is yours all the time: this Book of God contains it: O study it! miss it not all your life long! but so apply yourself to it, with the simplicity and the earnestness which God loves, that, before you die, you may see its glorious

light, and be guided by it into the haven where you would be!

3. Thus the example of Cornelius on the one hand, and the conversion of Cornelius on the other hand, may admonish us according to our need. And shall we not learn something also from the Apostle's vision, by which he was made *willing in the day of Christ's power*, to *open the door of faith to the Gentiles? What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.*

(1) The words were spoken, first of all, of *persons*. Those Gentiles, who are as much God's creatures and God's children as are the natural seed of Abraham; those Gentiles, whom it is His pleasure now at once to receive into equality of position and equality of acceptance with the Jews, on the ground of the same faith in Christ Jesus which alone can enable a sinner of any race to draw near to God; think not of these, and speak not of these, and act not towards these, as though they were excluded from thy sympathy by a mere difference of blood and lineage. Be ready for that call which is now instant, to go to a Gentile home as its first Apostle and Evangelist. Such was the meaning of the text, as it first fell upon the ear of St Peter in his vision on the housetop.

But what does it say to us? We are in no danger of needing its first lesson. We ourselves are Gentiles, and know that our one hope lies in the abolition of Mosaic ordinances, and the admission of all nations of men into the fold and Church of Christ. And yet we are for ever making to ourselves new distinctions, less excusable and far more arbitrary, on the ground of which we refuse to other men our sympathy and our charity.

Such, for example, are those differences of opinion and observance which divide the Christian church itself into parties within and sects without. How slow are we to give the right hand of fellowship to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity! How apt are we to scrutinize the precise forms of words in which others express themselves, and to judge harshly and speak uncharitably of any who do not frame their ideas of truth exactly on our model! May we not apply to such cases the warning voice of this vision, *What God hath cleansed,* by His own forgiving act, and by His own indwelling Spirit, *that call not thou common?* Frame not new conditions of Christian unity, beyond faith in the same Saviour and the visible fruits of the same Spirit. *Who art thou that judgest*

another man's servant? to his own Master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. Let us follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God.

But we might almost wish that our divisions sprang only or chiefly out of differences of doctrine. At least it would show that we were interested and anxious about the things of God, however mistaken in our use of them. Alas! I fear it is more often from other causes that we disapprove and despise our brethren. How prone are we to make our own little circle, and then disparage all who are out of it! How ready to say, Such a person is beneath my notice; too low in birth or too humble in station to be fit company for me and mine! And thus even amongst those who are dwelling side by side in the same street of the same little town, and whom a stranger might imagine to be not far at least from an equality of position, there will be found parties within parties and distinctions within distinctions, severing them altogether from anything like unity, and splitting up the body of Christ, even in its smallest portions,

into shreds and fragments as minute as they are arbitrary. Well may it be said to such creators of differences, *What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.* Be broad and generous in your sympathies, and love not to exclude but to combine.

And thus it is yet more visibly, when we reach the thought of the more destitute members of Christ's body. In what a contemptuous spirit do many deal with the poor! How slow are they to remember the Apostle's question, *Who maketh thee to differ? What hast thou which thou didst not receive?* How commonly do we think and judge of the poor, as though there were something wrong in being in need; as though the presence of poverty, apart from any question as to its cause, were not painful only but almost contaminating; as though it did away with the nominal unity of all human beings in a common Father and Redeemer and Sanctifier, and justified a tone and a manner altogether disparaging and contemptuous! *My brethren, these things ought not so to be. What God hath cleansed,* what He has not thought beneath the notice of His Providence and of His salvation, ought not surely to be below the regard of those who owe everything themselves

to His bounty: *what God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.* We are all one, in the aspect of His creation and of His redemption: let us be one also in the aspect of our own sympathy, our own charity, and our own love!

(2) Finally, the words of the text have an application, just and true, not to persons only, but to *things.*

There is in all of us a strong tendency to disparage the sacredness of earthly life. We are apt to call it common. Some have done so in a religious but a morbid spirit. The light of eternity, presented perhaps in the midst of a career of thoughtlessness or sin, has dazzled the eye which was unused to it. The question, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* has been answered to their ear, not as Christ would have answered it; not by bidding them do for Him what before they had done for themselves; not by bidding them, *in the calling wherein they were called, therein* henceforth to *abide with God;* but rather by a call to *go out of the world,* to frame for themselves a new set of duties and of interests, and to run away from temptations which ought rather to be met and conquered. What God has cleansed, His servants have sometimes called common. They could not

understand how God has provided for each one of us a sacred calling in a common one; how *the trivial round, the common task,* may be so elevated and so sanctified by an all-pervading and all-constraining love of Christ, as to become that very circle of *good works, which God has before prepared that we should walk in it.*

Others, again, and more, we fear, in number, have called the occupations of life common, and in calling have made them so. It is easy enough to keep God out of our earthly life; far, far easier than to bring Him into it. God has cleansed it. He has given, and He has sanctioned, and He has blessed, and He has sanctified, all the relations of life and all its duties and all its offices, its work and its relaxations, its intercourse and its companionships, to be a daily offering, of innocence, of thankfulness, of happiness, of usefulness, to His honour no less than to our good. It is not of Him that it is common. But any one of us can make it so. We have only to follow inclination, we have only to let ourselves alone, we have only to make no effort and use no means; and life will be common, every part of it, for us, even though in itself, and as God gave it, and as some actually find it, it is indeed *none other than the*

house of God, none other than the very *gate of heaven!*

This then is our struggle: how, without going out of the world, we may be kept in it from the evil. And this is the very happiness of knowing Christ. He who has passed through all, and has died to sanctify all, can both feel with our infirmities, and also raise us out of them. Miss not, Christian brethren, through neglect, procrastination, or sin, the attainment of this great salvation! *Seek ye the Lord, while He may be found. The night cometh:* then let the day be well used! *The night cometh:* then let it not find you among those who, so far as the soul is concerned, have *stood all the day idle! The night cometh:* then let it be to you a night of rest after toil, and not of gloom or confusion, not of fatal surprise, and not of outer darkness! *Seeing ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless.*

LECTURE V.

THE GOSPEL TO THE GENTILES.

ACTS X. 33.

Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

WOULD that this might be the spirit of us also, my brethren, who are here assembled this night! Would that we might all regard ourselves as gathered together to receive a message; a message from God, and a message to the soul!

We have heard already of that twofold preparation which God made for the first preaching of the Gospel to a Gentile; how he was prepared to receive, and how an Apostle was prepared to communicate, under these new circumstances, the word of eternal life. To-night we are to read how and in what form the communication itself was made, by which *the middle*

wall of partition was effectually *broken down,* and the whole world entered upon an inheritance hitherto confined and restricted to a single nation.

The hasty and impetuous Peter had now become, under the influence of transforming grace, a considerate and a self-governed man. He allowed a night to intervene before he set out on his new commission. Doubtless it was a night of much communing with himself, and of much prayer to God also. Since the great day of Pentecost, seven or eight years before, he had known no crisis so momentous. That flinging back of the golden gates of the kingdom, by the application of the Apostolical key, to admit men of every race and tongue and creed, on the simple condition of faith within and of baptism without, was an event, difficult indeed for us to marvel at, but for him, educated as he had been, and prepossessed as he had been, nothing less than a revolution in the eternal counsels of God. But Peter, though he had lost his impetuosity and was fast losing his prejudices, had not lost his vigour for action, nor his readiness to give effect to conviction. After one night of calm reflection, diligent search, and earnest prayer, he was

ready to set forth on his errand; accompanied, not only by the three messengers of Cornelius, but also, in consideration no doubt of the gravity and interest of the occasion, by certain members of the infant Church of Joppa.

The journey safely accomplished, by the afternoon of the second day, Peter is received at the house of Cornelius by an expectant company of the kinsmen and near friends of its master. At the door, Cornelius meets him, with an act of homage to the exalted character of his visitor, which was already familiar to a Roman in the case of his Emperor, but which the Apostle, mindful of his Master's solemn charge, refused as an act of superstition and idolatry. *Stand up: I myself also am a man.* The minister of Christ, even if he be an Apostle, is still but a man: in that identity of nature with his people lies as much his strength as his weakness. Compassed, like them, with every infirmity, he can both feel for the sins and the weaknesses of others, and also *comfort them in all their tribulation with the comfort wherewith he himself is comforted of God.*

He entered the house talking with him, and at once addressed himself to the company whom he there found assembled. First of all,

he reminds them of the deep-rooted principle from which he is departing, in coming to them at all. A Jew could only associate with those whom first he has brought over not only to his own religion as a matter of opinion and doctrine, but also to his own religion as a matter of ritual and ceremonial. But *God has showed him that he should not call any man*, any human being, *common or unclean*. It needed God's own teaching, the teaching of a divine vision and a divine voice, to write upon his heart this (to us) elementary lesson; that every human being is in the sight of God of equal value; that He looks not upon the nominal creed or the religious enlightenment, any more than He looks upon the rank or the wealth or the colour, as giving or withholding a share in the universal sonship and the universal brotherhood of man. Let us, who have learned the lesson, or who scarcely needed to learn it, see that we also remember, and that we also practise it!

Now therefore, having come to them without gainsaying, as soon as he was sent for, he must know for what intent they have sent for him. Cornelius answers by recounting the story of his vision. Four days ago he was

fasting till that ninth hour of the day which had again come round at the moment of Peter's arrival. During that hour he was praying in his house. Suddenly *there stood before him a man*—that is, one in the form of a man, but described before as *an Angel of God—in bright apparel.* In words few but most encouraging, this messenger of God assured him of the acceptance of his prayers, and of the remembrance before God of that self-denying bounty to the poor by which he attested the sincerity of his devotion. To him who thus had, more should now be given. *Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither* a man named *Simon, whose surname is Peter:* he is lodging there, in a particular house—of which the owner and his trade are expressly mentioned—by the sea-side; *who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.*

Ten verses comprise the whole of St Peter's answer; the whole of that revelation which was to be the eternal life of Cornelius and his house. *Not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but by demonstration of the Spirit and of*

power, was the first Gentile conversion wrought, and the gates of the heavenly kingdom set wide open to mankind.

Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him. God looks not on the race or the profession or the outward ritual: He does not accept a man for being a Jew, or reject a man for being a Gentile. That is what St Peter says. He does not say, as some would pervert his words, that it matters not what a man believes, provided his life is moral, and his conduct consistent with his knowledge and his principles. The brief answer to such a construction of his words is found in the fact of his being there to utter them. If Cornelius was safe in his prayers and his almsgivings, why was St Peter sent to tell him words whereby he and all his house might be saved? The stress lies on the words *in every nation.* No longer amongst the Jews only, but in every tribe and race of man, those who are willing to know God's will, those who are sincere and candid and conscientious, are called and are chosen and are fitted to *receive health and salva-*

tion through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Light is come into the world: and he that doeth truth cometh to that light,* that he may walk in it and be saved. *He that is of God heareth God's words:* he that feareth God and (according to his power) worketh righteousness is accepted with Him as a hearer of Christ's Gospel, and an inheritor, whether Jew or Gentile, of every hope and every blessing of the faithful. *In Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision. In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but a new creature...but faith which worketh by love.*

Now therefore St Peter can boldly speak to this Gentile the word of eternal life.

The word (or *communication*) *which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching* (*proclaiming the glad tidings of*) *peace by means of Jesus Christ;* peace with God, after estrangement and enmity, through Jesus Christ: *He is Lord of all;* not of Jews only, but of the whole race of men; *Lord,* as St Paul expresses it, *both of the dead and living: ye know,* I say, *the word:* or rather *the thing;* just as in the Gospel of St Luke the shepherds say one to another, *Let us go now even unto Bethlehem,*

and see this word (thing) which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us: it is so here: *ye know the thing,* the fact, the event, *which came to pass throughout all Judea, having begun from Galilee after the baptism which John proclaimed; even Jesus of (from) Nazareth, how God anointed Him,* made Him the Christ or Messiah—it is the same word—*with the Holy Ghost and with power.* The sentence is often broken. It all depends on the words, *Ye know.* First we have, *Ye know the communication which God sent.* Then, *Ye know the thing which took place throughout Judea.* Then, *Ye know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him.* The *word (communication)* of the 36th verse, and the *word (fact)* of the 37th verse, are said in the 38th verse to be identical with the person of *Jesus of Nazareth.* He is the word, He is the fact, which constitutes the Gospel.

And now read the brief account of His life and of His work.

Who went about doing good. Benefiting is the exact expression. His whole ministry was that of a Benefactor. *And healing all that were oppressed (tyrannized over) by the devil: for God was with Him.* The devil is man's tyrant:

he uses them as mere subjects and creatures, and treats them with all the insolence of a despot. That is one remark upon the words. Do not count yourself free until Christ has made you so: till then you are a slave, under the despotism and tyranny of one who is stronger than you, though there be One and but One who is stronger even than he. And again, this bondage to the devil is a state of disease: Christ *heals* those who are oppressed of the devil: it is health to be a Christian; and it is disease to be the slave of sin.

And we are witnesses of all things that He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. We can tell you of these things, because we ourselves saw them. *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.* It is a matter of fact, of which we are eye-witnesses.

Whom also they slew by hanging on a tree, on the malefactor's cross. *Him God raised* from death *on the third day, and showed Him openly (gave Him to become manifest); not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from among the dead: and charged us to proclaim to the people and to asseverate* (literally, *to protest,* or *assert with strong*

protestation and appeal) that He is the very person who has been ordained (marked out) by God, as the Judge of quick and dead; of those who shall be alive, and of those who shall be already dead when He comes again in His glory.

To Him all the prophets bear witness, that every one who believes on Him receives (as a single act) *remission (dismissal) of sins through His name.*

While Peter was still speaking these words, there fell the Holy Ghost upon all who were hearing the word (communication). And all the believing Jews who came with Peter were astonished, that even upon the Gentiles the gift of the Holy Ghost is (hath been) poured forth: for they heard them speaking with tongues, in various dialects and languages, *and magnifying God. Then answered Peter,* said in reply to their expressions of amazement, *Can any one hinder the water* of holy Baptism, *so that these men should not be baptized? persons who received the Holy Ghost even as also we?* we who on the day of Pentecost were made partakers of that marvellous gift? *And he ordered that they should be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay on for some days.*

1. Such, my brethren, was the Gospel, in the days and on the lips of the Apostles. It was a record of facts; and out of the facts grew the doctrines. It was not a mere lesson of morality. It did not say, Do your best, and God will accept you. It did not say, Care not about opinion, care not about doctrine, if only your life is right. Cornelius, whose life was blameless and exemplary, still needed Christ, and the Holy Spirit too, for his salvation. His diligent use of the light he had, brought him more light: such is God's rule: but it did not enable him to dispense with it. What showed God's acceptance was, God's teaching, God's illumination; not God's acquiescing in his condition, and leaving him as he was. And when that teaching, when that illumination came, what was it? It was a narrative: it was a history: it was a testimony of certain things which had happened, which had been done, upon this earth of ours: in short, it was the account of a Person; of One who, though Himself man, had altogether changed and reversed man's condition; had shown Himself superior to the whole power and empire of evil; had broken the yoke of sin and Satan in instances numerous enough and decisive enough to show

that He could do it in all; had lived a life such as never man lived, and spoken words such as never man spake; had then given His very life as a ransom for many; had died upon the cross to take away sin, and after dying had also risen again to be the living High Priest, the Mediator and the Advocate with God, of all who believe; to be both the Judge of human kind, and also the Atonement and the Propitiation for human sin. Such was the Gospel as preached by an Apostle to the first convert of our Gentile world. It was a narrative of facts: it was the history of a Person. It was our Apostles' Creed which formed the original Gospel to the Gentiles.

And is it not so still? Is it not the faith of a Person, even of our Lord Jesus Christ, which still removes mountains, still converts, regenerates, strengthens, purifies? *This is the victory that overcometh the world,* even *our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? Purifying their hearts by faith.* The Gospel of our salvation is the revelation of a Saviour.

And has that Gospel now lost its savour? Must we look out for some other because the first is worn out? So the world judges, and

the Church has too much caught the infection. We fear that even Christian Sermons are too much estimated now by their eloquence or their novelty, and too little by their proclamation of Christ Himself as the Redeemer of the lost and the Life of the dead. In the same degree are we in danger of losing sight of the Apostolical maxim, and with it of that which makes the whole fire and force of our ministry, *We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.* God help us all, my brethren, if it be so —us in our place, and you in yours—to come back to the simplicity and (with it) to the strength of St Peter's first Sermon to the Gentiles!

2. God in a remarkable manner bare it witness. While the brief narrative was still proceeding, the very gift of Pentecost was poured upon the hearers. *The fire of the Lord fell,* and attested the sacrifice. By an inversion of which we possess no other record in Scripture, the inward gift preceded the outward dedication. Elsewhere Baptism went first, and the gift of the Spirit followed. Here it is the gift of the Spirit which demands and justifies the Baptism. God is a God of

order, but He is not restricted by His own laws. Nothing less than the Pentecostal sign would have furnished an irresistible argument for this first Gentile Baptism. *Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they* (the objectors) *held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*

Yet, lest any should draw from this inversion an argument against the importance of forms, it was required that the outward sign should follow, since it could not precede, the inward grace. Though the Holy Spirit had already fallen upon them, still they must be baptized in the name of the Lord. How presumptuous then, in later times, to say, Because the form is not all, therefore the form is nothing! if I have the Spirit, I may dispense with the baptismal water! There is too much of this tendency in all of us, to argue and cavil where God has spoken. God has been pleased, in His two holy Sacraments, to remind us that in this life we are body as well as soul, and that the two elements of our being are won-

derfully and fearfully commingled. The body acts upon the soul; the soul, in all its volitions, must act through the body. God knows this: God made it so to be. In the two sacraments therefore, of Baptism and of the Lord's Supper, He has been pleased to recognise the use of the body in the things of the soul. He has been pleased to testify to realities unseen through the medium of things material and corporeal. *The washing of water* must accompany *the word* in our admission, and the participation of the bread and the wine must assist the spiritual communion in our support and sustentation.

Those who talk slightingly of forms are seldom those who know most of the Spirit. Not without form, though not by forms only, can the work of Christ, which is the work of human salvation, be carried forward in the world. It has been truly said that, if the doctrine of the Gospel had been launched in the world without the institution of a Church—that is, a society cemented by ordinances—to give it body and substance in the face of the world, it might have waxed fainter and feebler, generation by generation, until at last it actually died out and vanished away. *The Church* is

called in Scripture *the pillar and ground of the truth.* The Church—that is, the congregation of faithful men united by the possession of God's Word and Christ's Sacraments—is that which supports and bears up the whole fabric of truth and revelation. And we all know, from our own experience, how much our faith, whether it be weak or whether it be strong, owes to the possession amongst us of a house of prayer, regular seasons of worship, and a standing ministry to lead and to guide and (as God enables it) to quicken our devotion. Take away all these things, or any of these things, and where should we be? Destroy this temple, to rise no more from its ruins; make its services slovenly, rare, or repulsive; let there be no one to go in and out before you in the exercise of a regular ministration; let there be no visitation of the sick, no care for the poor, no catechizing of the young, no word of comfort, advice, or warning, to such as stand in need of each; and who does not know how serious would be the loss to himself and to the cause of good in the place in which our lot in life has fallen? I know not whose faith would stand the test of an utter denial of all help either from public worship or from

private ministrations; an absolute removal of that candlestick, the Church, which is not indeed, but which yet holds, the light of the word, the lamp of the truth.

Let us not lose, my brethren, by supineness or lethargy of soul, the advantages which God has given us. *Freely* indeed we *have received:* let us thankfully use, let us *freely give. Thou, O God, sentest a gracious rain upon Thine inheritance, and refreshedst it when it was weary. Thy congregation shall dwell therein: for Thou, O God, hast of Thy goodness prepared for the poor.* May He of His infinite mercy give us first that preparation of the heart, and then also that answer of peace and grace, both of which, alike and equally, are from above, *coming down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning.*

LECTURE VI.

A HELPING HAND.

ACTS XI. 23.

Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

So great an event as the admission of the first Gentile into the Church of God, could not pass without notice, enquiry, and even complaint. We all know what the force of prejudice is: and of all prejudices none was ever so deeply rooted as the spirit of religious exclusiveness in the heart of a Jew. He could not understand how there could be any other way of entrance for a Gentile into God's favour, save only through the narrow door of proselytism and of circumcision.

Accordingly when St Peter returned to Jerusalem after that solemn scene at Cæsarea

of which we read last Sunday, he was at once met by the indignant remonstrances of what may be called the narrow party in the Church of the capital of Judaism. *Thou wentest in*, we hear, *to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.* As usual in all cases of misunderstanding, where there is a real good will and good intention on both sides, a simple statement of the facts cleared up everything. St Peter told them of his vision at Joppa, and of the voice that followed and expounded it. *What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.* His mind thus prepared for some relaxation, he knew not what, of ceremonial rigidity—for some extension, he knew not what, of the sympathies and charities of a Christian—he finds already at the door of the house three persons summoning him to Cæsarea. A divine intimation within bids him to accept the call. Taking with him a competent number of impartial witnesses, to attest the circumstances which might be about to unfold themselves, he journeys to Cæsarea. There he hears of a vision, the very counterpart and index of his own, by which the summons to himself had been suggested and inspired. He begins to speak. He has just touched upon the Gospel

history; has told of the life of Jesus and of His death, of His resurrection and manifestation, of His office as the Judge and of His office as the Propitiation. While he yet speaks, the infallible sign of the Divine presence, the visible and audible proof (familiar to him from the great Pentecost) of the Holy Spirit's working, is vouchsafed to those who listen. He remembered the Saviour's promise, *Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost:* and how could he doubt that the gift of that Baptism justified the administration of the other? that the presence of the inward grace demanded the application of the outward sign? *Can any man*, he had asked aloud in the house of Cornelius, *forbid the water? what was I*, he asks now of the gainsayers at Jerusalem, *that I could forbid God*—the word is the same in the two cases—*that these should not be baptized, who had received the Holy Ghost as well as we?* The question was its own answer. Prepossession and prejudice could not stand before it. *When they heard these things, they held their peace, and* even *glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*

Thus was the main question decided. The

Gentiles must be recognized as members, equally with the Jews of the Church of Christ. On what terms they should be thus recognized; whether on condition of keeping the Law as well as believing the Gospel; was a question not yet opened, but destined to exercise a powerful influence on the peace of the Church in days of which we shall presently read the record.

Simultaneously, or nearly so, with this great event, the conversion of Cornelius, a wider work of good was going on, under God's Providence, beyond the region of Palestine. We have read of the great scattering which arose on the death of Stephen. The 8th chapter told us that the whole Church at Jerusalem, except the Apostles only, was *scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.* And here we read that the dispersion and its consequences spread more widely still. Through Phenice, or Phenicia, on the coast of the Mediterranean, north of Palestine—through the neighbouring island of Cyprus, and even to the great city of Antioch, the metropolis of Syria—journeyed far and wide these heralds of the Gospel, causing even *the fierceness of* persecuting *man* to *turn to God's praise.* Up to

this time they had confined their ministry to the Jews. *But some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene*—we read, you remember, in the 2nd chapter, of *the parts of Libya about Cyrene* as furnishing some of the strangers in Jerusalem, and doubtless also some of the Christian converts, on the great day of Pentecost—*who, having come to Antioch, began to speak unto the Greeks*, that is, *to the Gentiles, preaching the glad tidings of the Lord Jesus.*

If *the Grecians* spoken of were only the Greek-speaking Jews—the Jews resident in foreign lands, and using as their ordinary speech the Greek language—there would be nothing new in the event described: for from the very first there had been in this sense, as we read expressly in the 6th chapter, *Grecians* as well as *Hebrews* within the pale of the Christian Church. But the remarkable thing was, that now, not only in the single instance just read of at Cæsarea, but in more distant parts of the Empire, Gentiles were beginning to enter the Church without passing through the gate of Judaism.

And the hand of the Lord was with them, with these preachers to the Gentiles: God set His seal to the work, by giving them the Holy

Spirit even as He had done to the Jewish believers: *and a great number which believed turned unto the Lord.*

Tidings of this important work reached ere long the ears of the Church at Jerusalem; and in pursuance of their usual practice —of which the 8th chapter gave us an example—they sent out a special representative to observe and report upon the facts. In this instance the messenger of the Church was that holy man, of whom we read in the 4th chapter that he gave the first instance of entire self-devotion to the cause of Christ and His people, by selling his land for the benefit of the Christian community. Here we learn more of his character. *They sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch: who, when he arrived, and saw the grace of God,* saw God's favour and blessing so evidently and so largely bestowed, *was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave to the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith. And a large multitude was added to the Lord. And he went forth to Tarsus to seek Saul; and having found him he brought him to Antioch. And it happened to them even for a whole year to*

be assembled in the congregation, and to teach a large multitude: and it happened *that in Antioch first of all the disciples were called Christians.*

A prediction of coming famine conveyed to the Church of Antioch by a prophet named Agabus, and fulfilled not long afterwards during the same reign of Claudius, led the disciples of that place, in a true spirit of Christian charity and believing forethought, to begin at once a collection for the expected sufferers in Judea. And this collection was carried to the managing elders at Jerusalem by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

1. Barnabas was *a good man:* not one of those stern, rigid, unloving men, who think their work done when they have just borne a testimony; but a kindly, benevolent, and beneficent man; one who had first given up his all for his brethren, and then, as the best of gifts, as that without which the other would have been valueless, gave himself. How beautifully every part of the description hangs together! What he had done, and what he was now doing, is explained and accounted for by what he was. *A good man, and full of the Holy Ghost,* of that Divine Spirit which is *first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be*

entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy; full also of *faith,* of that power of looking above and beyond earth, of apprehending the future and beholding the invisible, which makes sacrifice easy and the heavenly mind natural. That was his character, his Christian character. Whatever he may have had from nature—perhaps a kindly disposition, an amiable temper, a loving heart—we know not—he certainly had not from nature his *fulness of the Holy Ghost and of faith.*

2. And now as to his work. *When he came, and saw the grace of God, he was glad.* There are persons who are not glad when they see the grace of God. Sometimes it only reproves, convicts, and therefore irritates them. As taking pleasure in the wickedness of others is the last stage of sin, so a genuine delight in the holiness of others is perhaps the highest step in grace. To many of us, I fear, the sight of another's goodness is not a cause of joy. If this is so, we ought indeed to suspect ourselves. We who pray, *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,* ought to be glad when we see the faintest sign of either. If we are not glad, there must be an unsoundness somewhere; a

want of zeal at least, if not a want of sincerity.

He was glad, and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. Barnabas was so named by the Apostles to express his character. He was *a son of consolation.* But that word *consolation* is the same, in the original language, with *exhortation* or *encouragement.* He *exhorted* them all, might be rendered, he *consoled* or he *comforted* them all. We have often remarked that the Holy Scriptures know of no such comforting as stops with itself. To comfort is, in God's language, to encourage, to cheer on, to animate to nobler efforts and a more pure devotion. That was what Barnabas, *Son of consolation,* did when he saw the grace of God at Antioch. He consoled by exhorting, by encouraging, by cheering on. How opposite is this to the teaching of many! A cold chilling statement of duty, or a stern and repulsive reproof for disobedience, this is, too often, all that we get from those who are charged with our oversight in a family or in the congregation. But that exhortation is not Christian, which is not an encouragement, a cheering on; a saying, *Thus far have you come: now press on to this beyond.*

The holy Apostle of whom we are reading was able to feel, with regard to the converts at Antioch, that they had indeed found Christ. And therefore his exhortation, his encouragement, could be safely and surely this, *As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him:* as ye have turned to the Lord, so with purpose of heart cleave to Him. It is the same word by which our Lord Himself expressed the attendance upon Him of the multitudes who had followed Him into the wilderness. *I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat.* They had been *cleaving to Him* for three days in a desert place. In a higher, a spiritual sense, it is so here. The business of one who has come to Christ, is to continue with Him. The business of one who has joined himself to Christ, is to cleave to Him; to wait upon Him for the daily guidance, the daily supplies, the daily healing, and the daily strength.

And do not the words themselves say to us, that there is a difficulty in doing this? that there is a temptation to look off from Christ, to leave Him, to walk no more with Him? Yes, we all find that, hard as it is to

come to Him, it is harder still to stay with Him. It is difficult to bend the stubborn will, to bow the proud neck, so as to stoop to accept Him as the Saviour of the lost and of the vile. But it is yet more difficult, when that first humbling is accomplished, and when hope and comfort have reentered the soul through the sacrifice and the mediation of Jesus Christ, then to remain. We seem to have got what we came for: why should we stay? It needs a long and often a bitter experience to make a man feel his own weakness and his own dependence. We are all too much like children, eager to walk alone, till repeated falls bring us back humbled to the guiding hand of which we had thought to be independent.

And we remark how opposite are the causes which lead us to walk carelessly or intermittently with Jesus. Sometimes it is the self-confidence of a little strength gained; the ungrateful treatment, by one to whom Christ has shown mercy, of the very Benefactor from whom he has received it. Sometimes it is the mere weariness of hope long deferred: we have waited long upon Christ, and He has not seemed to look upon us. Sometimes it is the vexation of one who finds himself

perpetually falling, and is tempted to say, What is the use of praying? my life is even more sinful than before I first called upon a Saviour: I will trifle with Him no more; I must walk alone, and guard my own steps as I may. And need I say that it is sometimes the presence of direct temptation, which makes us walk loosely and negligently with Jesus? the influence of the world, closing us in on every side, and making us say even as it says; calling evil good, and good evil; calling the seen real, and the temporal eternal: or else the power of the flesh, making some desired indulgence so necessary to us, that we must have it (we say) if we die for it; some evil desire or sinful lust so fixing itself in our bosom that we cannot even pray to be rid of it: or else, once again—for this too is possible—the subtle whisper of the devil himself, suggesting doubts to the inmost soul as to the power or the very being of Christ or of God; saying in the secret ear, *Yea, hath God said?* or, *God doth know that it is not so;* or, *Ye shall not surely die: on the contrary, Ye shall be as gods!* This earliest and most often repeated temptation, embracing in itself the two other, and giving them their edge and their sting, is evermore

drawing souls away from Him who is their life, and necessitating again and again the very exhortation of the text, that they who have once turned to the Lord should with purpose of heart cleave to Him.

The words seem to have a special application to those younger members of the Church who are about to seal upon themselves the vows of their Baptism. O for the persuasive word of an Apostle, O for that Divine grace which alone made even an Apostle's word effectual, to keep those faithful to Christ who are now about to come to Him! May we see in them the steady frequenters, while life lasts, of God's House and of Christ's Table! May we see in them examples of that true godliness which has the promise of this life and of that which is to come! And that it may be so, God grant to them that blessed spirit of watchfulness and holy fear, that mistrust of self and that trust in Him, that earnestness not to fail or come short of the heavenly calling, of which it is the sure effect to keep them close to Him whose grace is sufficient for the most sinful, and whose strength is made perfect in weakness!

3. It is one beautiful trait in the character

of Barnabas, that he was ever helping forward those whose position in the Church of Christ was less clear or less established than his own. When Saul arrived in Jerusalem three years after his conversion, and the disciples were all afraid of him, not believing that he, so lately a persecutor, could indeed be one of themselves; it was Barnabas who took him and brought him to the Apostles; declaring how he had seen the Lord in the way, and had already preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And here also, when a new field of labour was so marvellously whitening to the harvest, we find Barnabas, before he could set himself to the reaping, going forth to Tarsus to seek Saul; remembering, no doubt, the energy and devotion of his character, and also (it may be) those intimations which had already been vouchsafed to him of a special mission and apostleship to the Gentiles. The Scriptures are full, and the records of the Church in all times are full also, of the effects of a helping hand given at critical moments to promising but undeveloped characters. It was thus that Aquila and Priscilla took to them Apollos, when he knew only the preliminary Baptism of John, and *expounded to him the way of God more perfectly.* It was

thus that in the earliest days of the Gospel Andrew found his own brother Simon, saying to him, *We have found the Messias*, and brought him to Jesus. Alas! how much have we to answer for, the very best of us, in discouragements, or at least in a want of attraction and encouragement, to the weaker faith or colder temperament of others in the things of God! It is easier, no doubt, for a Christian to live in his own little circle of congenial friends, of persons already one with him in conviction and manner of life, forgetful of the unleavened mass or of the imperfect and half-formed elements around him. And some men even avow the principle: they do not even profess to mix with any but decided Christians. And we well know that each man is bound to be considerate of his own safety: he is not to throw himself wilfully amidst evil influences, on the plea that he would counteract those influences and turn them into good. There are perhaps those who are as yet scarcely ripe for influencing, and must take good heed lest they rather learn evil than communicate good. But assuredly he is no Christian, who cares not to draw others after him in Christ's service. *Barnabas departed to Tarsus, for to seek Saul;* and the

result was, that by their joint labours they did what no single-handed toil could have accomplished, in the instruction and edification and enlargement of the Church. Surely our language, sometimes at least and to some one, ought to be that beautiful invitation of the lawgiver of Israel, *We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel. And it shall be, if thou go with us, yea, it shall be, that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee.*

4. Finally, *the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.* That name which it is now an affront to refuse to any man, was once a term of distinction and even of reproach. St Peter speaks (in one of the three passages of Holy Scripture in which the name occurs) of a man *suffering as a Christian;* that is, undergoing shame and even punishment for the crime of being a Christian. Thus wonderfully has God established in the earth that holy religion which sprang originally from an obscure corner of a disregarded and despised land. What might it not have been now, if its own orders had been even faintly obeyed, and they who

bore the name of Christ had indeed *gone into all the world, and preached the Gospel to every creature?*

For ourselves, my brethren, let us ask before we separate this evening, Who is a Christian? Who rightfully bears that honoured name which was given, first, perhaps in mockery, at Antioch? *The disciples were called Christians.* Then, first we must be disciples of Christ. And what then is a disciple?

(1) He is a learner, he is a follower, he is a scholar, of Christ. He is one who comes to Christ to be taught, and continues with Him, cleaves to Him, to learn. Does not that description condemn some of us? Are we as yet even learners in Christ's School? Do not some of us say, I know enough: I have no need to learn? Do not some of us leave the books of that Divine school quite unopened? the book of Nature, the book of Providence, the book of conscience, the book of reflection and of self-knowledge, the book of the Word of life? Which of us came hither to-night to learn? Which of us goes away having learned something? A Christian is Christ's scholar; and Christ's scholar is one who is learning of Christ.

(2) But a Christian is more than a learner

of Christ. He is one who belongs to Christ; one who is of Christ's party, on Christ's side, in the world; one who is not ashamed of Christ, but regards and uses His name as his own chief honour and chief joy. It is true of all of us, that (in the words of the Gospel) Christ *has taught in our streets;* but the question will be, in the day of judgment, Hast thou *done the things which He said?* Hast thou had in thee *the mind which was in Him?* Hast thou been, like Him, self-denying and self-forgetting, meek and peaceable, poor in spirit and pure in heart? Hast thou *lived because He lived?* by virtue of a daily spiritual communication between thee and Him? Hast thou set thyself day by day to walk as He walked, and couldest thou say, in any sure sense, like St Paul, *It is no more I that live, but Christ liveth in me?*

By these and suchlike questions may the honest judge themselves, that they be not judged of the Lord. God give us all grace so to try and condemn ourselves now, that we may at last *have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming!*

LECTURE VII.

A SHORT-LIVED TRIUMPH.

ACTS XII. 5.

Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him.

WE have seen the Church in conflict with religious bigotry: now we are to see it assailed by open ungodliness. This chapter gives us the account of a royal persecution. We see it in its beginning, in its progress, and in its end. We see it in its success, in its failure, and in its punishment. We have before us a whole career, in its pride and its humiliation, its triumph and its discomfiture, its short-lived arrogance and its frightful dismay. That is one aspect of the chapter. That is its aspect towards them that are without. Another is its aspect towards the Church within. It shows

what danger is, and what anxiety is, and what death itself is, to the Christian; just how much, and just how little; enough to bring out great graces, enough to exercise faith and patience, a spirit of dependence and a spirit of supplication; not enough to cause one real misgiving, or to make a single true heart doubt where happiness lies, where safety, where strength, where victory.

Let us look first on the dark side of this picture. There is a king *stretching forth*, or *laying on, his hands, to vex*, that is, to harass and injure, *certain of the Church;* certain of those who belong to God's congregation, to God's assembly, gathered out of a world lying in wickedness into a body in which He Himself, through His Son, by His Spirit, continually dwells.

The name of this king is Herod. He is one of that Idumean or Edomite family, which by vigour and ambition, by servility and flattery, by unscrupulous scheming and (when it suited them) merciless cruelty, contrived to fill a conspicuous page in the history of the chosen people. *Herod the king* of whom this chapter tells, was grandson to that *Herod the king*, some of whose deeds are recorded in the 2nd chapter

of St Matthew's Gospel. The father of this Herod, Aristobulus by name, was son to the other Herod, and was murdered, like others of his family, by his own father's command. The Herod of this chapter, known as Herod Agrippa, had contrived, by a succession of manœuvres, to possess himself of all the dominions held by his grandfather. He was a man of address and artifice, little likely to scruple at any crime by which he might ingratiate himself with the people over which he ruled.

His first act of aggression upon the despised and hated Church, was directed against the Apostle James. *He killed James the brother of John with the sword.* Such is the short record of the first Apostolical martyrdom. And it is the only Apostolical martyrdom of which we have any record in Scripture. Far more was told of the martyrdom of the deacon Stephen. Such is the character of the historical Scriptures everywhere. One thing is dwelt upon, and another briefly told. Simplicity, naturalness, undesignedness, absence of rhetorical trick and stage effect, this we notice throughout, and we think we can see it to be of God.

Thus then one of those who *from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the*

Word; one of those who had *seen with their eyes and handled with their hands the Word of Life;* who had been with Him through His ministry, had beheld Him die, and had also seen Him risen; passed away early from his work to his reward. It was scarcely fifteen years, I suppose, since he had first heard that little word on the sea of Galilee, which had changed him from a fisherman into a *fisher of men;* had brought him into daily converse with the Lord of men and of Angels, and made him *count all things but loss* that he might *win Christ.* He had been one of the favoured few in various striking occurrences of the Saviour's life and ministry; in the death-chamber of Jairus's daughter, on the holy mount of Transfiguration, and in the mysterious agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. He had been one of two brothers, who, in days of ignorant zeal, had proposed to call fire from heaven upon a Samaritan village which refused them entrance; and who, again, in days of a no less ignorant ambition, had asked to sit on His right hand and on His left hand in their Master's glory. *Boanerges, sons of thunder,* He had named them, in days when the impetuosity of nature had not yet been checked by the influence of grace; and

when the sterner lessons of a deep self-knowledge had not yet matured into humility a character too self-asserting and self-confident for heaven. But now this was past; past too the mighty transformation of Pentecost, and the noble, the self-governed, the devoted years of the ministry which that day had opened. To him, first of the brothers, is that prophecy fulfilled, *Ye shall drink indeed of my cup* of suffering, *and be baptized with the baptism* of blood *that I am baptized with.*

And see, then, we say, how lightly the inspired record passes over that great transition. *He killed James the brother of John with the sword.* Not one word of the circumstances; of the length of the notice, or the manner of the preparation. No deathbed scene, no dying testimony; save indeed that best of testimonies which the death itself afforded. He had given his life in one sense: now he gave it in another. He had sacrificed self, now he offers life, upon Christ's altar. Nothing is made of it. It was natural that he who had really given the one, should, when it was demanded, really give the other. No word of lamentation is bestowed upon the exchange of life for immortality, of the temporal for the eternal. He

did his duty; he flinched not from a whole service: in him prophecy was fulfilled; and to him, as a matter of course, belonged the recompence of the reward. They who looked upon that early martyrdom, from amidst the labours and trials of the Apostolical life below, were not likely to feel regret for him who was so much the gainer.

But so it is: God appoints, and man submits: man, Christian man, can say with sincerity, whichever or whatever be his portion, *Thy will, O God, not mine, be done!*

The fate of the next destined victim is widely different. He too seems to be marked out for martyrdom. The appetite for blood is ever whetted by its indulgence: and thus Herod, *because he saw that* the murder of James *pleased the Jews, added to take Peter also. He apprehended him, and put him in prison, giving him in charge to four quaternions of soldiers,* to four sets of four soldiers each, *to guard him; intending after the passover,* which was now going on, *to bring him up,* for trial and execution, *to,* or rather *for,* before, in the sight and for the gratification of, *the people.* It was a crowded time in Jerusalem: strangers from all parts of the world flocked together to the fes-

tival: and the spectacle of an Apostle's execution was to be their sport and pastime in the intervals of religious duty. Such is religion, when it is once possessed and saturated with bigotry, fanaticism, and party zeal!

All seemed to promise well and surely for the persecutor and his people. *Peter then was kept in the prison:* by night and by day he is the one care of sixteen armed men: the four watches of the night are parcelled out amongst them: between two of them, an arm chained to each, he even sleeps; and two others keep the entrance, the one of the chamber, the other of the prison. Surely nothing can elude such vigilance? Surely the prey is secure, and the captive marked for the slaughter? So might man well judge. There is one, there is but one, impediment. *Peter therefore was kept in prison: but there was fervent prayer going on, by the Church, unto God concerning him.* Is there not great meaning in that little word *But?* Peter was safe in the prison; all had prospered thus far; Herod and his flatterers might well promise themselves an easy triumph: BUT *there was fervent prayer going on!* The Church, God's congregation, God's assembly, below, was calling in, by night and day,

a help, not of man, to counteract man's design. Little would Herod or his friends account of that; they might point to the iron gate, the massive bolts, the four quaternions: but faith, in spite of, and in full view of, all these things, still prays; prays earnestly, prays believingly, prays waitingly and watchingly; and therefore no Christian can account the deed done: to-morrow's dawn may be fixed for the execution; but He who *neither slumbers nor sleeps* has Israel in His keeping, and let no man presume to say, apart from Him, what one day or one night may bring forth!

The last night is come, but not gone. Peter sleeps, while the Church prays: it is their time for action, it is his for repose. His work now is to rest: *in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: cast all your care upon Him, for He careth for you. His heart is established, and does not shrink:* what if his martyrdom is to follow close upon that of the faithful James, and they who were so lately *partners* in the cares of a fisher's calling on the sea of Galilee, and have since been associated for a few short years in a noble ministry and Apostleship, are to be speedily reunited in a blessedness not of this world? *lovely and pleasant*

in their lives, and even in their deaths not divided? The same night Peter was sleeping: on each side of him a soldier, and two without, guarding the prison.

And behold, an Angel of the Lord (God) stood near, presented himself, *and a light shone in the chamber:* it was no mere dream; there was a light, betokening a divine presence, and testifying of reality: *and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise quickly. And the chains fell off from his hands.* There is to be no sign of haste or precipitation. Every part of his preparation is to be made in order: the departure is to be no flight: the girdle and the sandals, the tunic and the cloke, all are to be in place: and not until *all things are ready* is the word of command uttered, to follow the Angel from the prison.

Peter obeys, but with the half-consciousness of one who walks in sleep. *He wist not that it was true (real) which was done by the Angel; but thought he saw a vision.* Yet, all the time, the deliverance is real: they pass a first guard and a second, till they reach the iron gate, closing in the prison-precincts, and actually leading into the city: that gate opens for them, without key or force; and then, after guiding

him along one street, the purpose of the intervention being now accomplished, *the Angel forthwith departed from him.* God does nothing in vain: He begins where man must end, and ends where man can begin.

The deliverance thus achieved, reflection follows. Thus far Peter has been stupefied with the suddenness of the revulsion: death was staring him in the face, and lo, he walks free through the streets of Jerusalem. Who would not feel the naturalness of the description? *He comes to himself.* He had been (such is the figure) out of himself: his self-possession (as we speak) had been disturbed and shaken; now he is himself again: and what can his inference be, from all that has occurred and from that which now is, save that *the Lord* must have *sent forth His Angel, and rescued me out of the hand of Herod, and out of all the expectation of the people of the Jews?*

And whither shall he now betake himself? He knows the deep anxiety with which the Church of which he is a *pillar* must have regarded his imprisonment: so he bends his steps first to one of those homes of the Church, one of those private houses in which the congregation met for worship while the Church was still

young and militant, that he may relieve the distress which he knows must have befallen them, and carry in person the first tidings of safety and deliverance. The whole scene is vividly before us. His knock brings to the door a maiden of the household; not at once to open—for they were hard and evil times, and peril might lurk in the admittance of a stranger—but to hearken to the voice which should tell its errand, and report upon it to those within. The voice which calls to her is one well known. She had heard it often, we doubt not, leading the devotions of that pious home: she knew it at once for Peter's, and for very joy ran in before she opened. Her tidings were incredible. *They said unto her, Thou art mad. But she persisted in affirming that so it was. And* then *they said, It is his Angel;* it must be one of those *ministering spirits* who have in their charge *the heirs of salvation,* and who, in the character of the Angels of Christ's *little ones, do always* (as He Himself said) *behold the face of His Father who is in heaven.* But no: there is no mistake here, and no apparition: the Angel's office is ended, and Peter himself, in flesh and blood, is seen, when they open, to stand before the gate. Silencing with a motion

of the hand their eager and wondering exclamations, he tells his own story, and bids them, while he departs elsewhere for security and concealment, to carry the report of his miraculous deliverance to the surviving *James, the Lord's brother, and to the brethren* at the headquarters of the Church.

The sacred narrative would be incomplete without a painful record of the end of the persecutor and of his enforced instruments. Just as, in the ancient Church's history, when the faithful three were thrown by the order of the Eastern king into the burning fiery furnace, *the flame of the fire slew those men* who acted as his executioners; even so the captivity of Peter was fatal to the soldiers to whose charge he had been consigned. When the day broke, the day which was to have shown the spectacle of his execution, and the prisoner himself was found to have vanished from the prison-house; vain were the asseverations of his keepers to screen them from the charge of negligence or of collusion: *when Herod had sought for him and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death.* These are *the tender mercies of the wicked.* Disappointed rage must have its victim. If it

cannot be an Apostle, it must be an Apostle's keeper. But the retribution ends not there.

Herod himself goes down from Jerusalem to Cæsarea. There was at this time an angry feud between him and the people of Tyre and Sidon on the frontier of his dominions. They were ill able to part with his friendship, because, as in ancient times, they were dependent upon supplies of corn furnished from districts under his rule. They came to him therefore in solemn embassy, and gaining over first to their interest the king's chamberlain, they implored reconciliation and amity. This was the crowning point of Herod's triumphs. With an ambition glutted with success, and a vanity inflated by flattery, he appeared, on a set day, in royal apparel—the historian Josephus tells us that it was a tissue of silver thread, which shone like the light in the rays of the morning sun—and made an oration to these submissive auditors. Flattery ran on into impiety, and they all with one accord shouted, *It is the voice of a God, and not of a man.* This cry was the signal of the Divine punishment. *Immediately an Angel of the Lord (God) smote him, because he gave not God the glory, and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.*

Thus the chapter before us becomes an epitome of all history. In it the world and the Church are arrayed on opposite sides, the hosts of God and of Satan being marshalled for the encounter. On the one side there is rank and dignity and kingly power; a great name, a lawful authority acting by the appliances of guards and prison-houses, of implements of torture and preparations for execution. On the other side there is poverty and obscurity and insignificance; a prisoner unknown to fame, and a sentence which will bring after it no reproach of injustice. The world will have it all its own way; and the world's applause will follow the world's action. In the beginning all is success: the first victim falls unheeded, and tyranny is emboldened to add the second. No sign of opposition is yet visible: *to-morrow shall be as this day,* and the execution is as sure as the sentence which commands it. There is but one obstacle, and that is not worth mention. A few obscure men and women are praying in some humble home for God's interposition. They ask Him to put forth, as and when He will, the arm of His strength; to show that He is with them; to let it be seen that Christ's Church is His Church, and Christ's

cause His cause on the earth. Little can this do to stay the world's chariot in its career of victory! And yet, when we look again, *the prey is taken from the mighty, and the lawful captive delivered!* The prison is still shut, and the keepers stand without and within for its security: but he whom they guard is gone from them. He is gone forth, to resume his labours for Christ, in teaching and guiding, in administering and ruling; and the world has lost its triumph. Presently, not disappointment only, but punishment, overtakes the enemy of God: sin has found him out, and a loathsome putrefying corpse is all that remains of Herod in the palace of Cæsarea. And *the word of God*, all the time, is *growing and multiplying*. Its offer of pardon and life, of grace and sanctification, is entering new lands and penetrating other hearts. Its quiet toils, whether of piety or of charity, are still working their way: *Barnabas and Saul* have *fulfilled their ministry* at Jerusalem, and returned to Antioch: the waters have closed over the enemy's triumph, and the silence of dismay and despair has succeeded to the boastings of impiety and unbelief. *The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him.*

The practical lesson for all of us is, that we learn the power, and practise the grace, of that *effectual fervent prayer* which *availeth much. Peter was kept in prison, but fervent prayer was being constantly made by the Church unto God for him.* Which of us would not have thought that the time for prayer was past? A few short hours must run their course, and then the prisoner will be led out to his execution. Even now he lies within stone walls and iron gates: he is chained, hand and arm, to his keepers; and he lies at this moment in the helpless inactivity of sleep. Why prolong the vain struggle? *Why trouble ye the Master any further?* The will of God is plainly spoken: our friend is *appointed unto death:* look off from the spectacle: think not of the doomed, but of the surviving. Thus speaks that *spirit of the world* which lingers even in the regenerate: we *judge the Lord by feeble sense,* and, where we see not a way, we conclude at once that there is none. And yet, even while we thus argue, there stands within that prison an Angel of God. A light shines around, and a voice speaks of exertion and of escape. With senses but half awake, yet with a quietness of resolution which confesses the Divine mandate, the prisoner is

already dressing himself for his departure. A spell is upon the keepers that they raise not a finger, not a voice, for his detention. *My God hath sent His Angel, and hath shut the* very *lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me.* The first ward is safely passed, and the second: the iron gate leading to the city has opened for him of its own accord: he walks abroad, in the chill night air, and is at large from fear of evil. Soon will his knock startle you in your dwelling, and for very gladness you will scarcely believe that it is he himself.

My brethren, these things *were written for our admonition;* for our reproof, and for our encouragement. If this be the power of prayer; if it be the appointed, the divinely appointed link, between the will of God to bless, and the actual bestowal of the blessing; where is our faith if we try it not, if we test not its efficacy? Which of us is not an unbeliever, if not in his creed, yet in his prayers? Which of us truly feels that prayer is speaking to God? that prayer is the communication between the needy and the All-sufficient, between the sinner and the All-holy, between the child that wants everything and the Father who is able and willing to supply all? Which of us is not

scanty, hasty, perfunctory, unbelieving, in his prayers for himself? And which of us is not yet more so in his prayers for others? Who prays as he ought for temporal blessings; for bread to eat, and raiment to put on; for a helping hand in need, and a sympathizing voice in sorrow? Even in these things, *ye have not, because ye ask not.* But O, tenfold more in things spiritual: tenfold more in the matter of sins which want conquering, and duties which want fulfilling! Where is he amongst us who *wakens* himself *morning by morning to hear* God's voice and to seek God's help? Where is he who sets himself to the day's employments in the spirit of one who *prays without ceasing?* Where is he who long before midday has not lost altogether the dew of the morning, or who comes back to the fountain of grace to renew his strength, that, *having done all,* he may be found at eventide still *standing?* And where, O where, is he, who has ever tried amongst us, as these early disciples tried it, the grace of intercession? How narrow and bounded are our conceptions of the Omnipotence of God! how carnal and earthly our interpretation of the eternal promise, which bids us *ask and have, seek and find!* Let us try it for one another,

as we have never yet tried it. If any soul be tied and bound by its sin, let us pray God earnestly, and not faint, that He will open the door of that prisonhouse, and set the captive free; that His light may shine in the darkness, and the voice, not of an Angel, but of His own Holy Spirit, bid him gird himself and follow! If these things be done, assuredly *the Lord's arm is not shortened that it cannot save, nor His ear heavy that it cannot hear. The prayer of faith* can still (as it is written) *save the sick;* and they who pray one for another, earnestly, constantly, and in the name of Christ, shall still from time to time, through God's grace, *save a soul from death, and hide* in the Saviour's blood *a multitude of sins.*

LECTURE VIII.

THE SPIRIT'S CALL AND THE CHURCH'S MISSION.

ACTS XIII. 2.

The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

HITHERTO this Divine Book has had many subjects: henceforth it will have but one. The life of him who, next to the Divine Master Himself, is the great example of all ministers, and more especially of all missionaries; their example in simplicity and purity of doctrine; in singlemindedness, earnestness, charity, and self-devotion; in all that can ennoble man, recommend religion, honour Christ, or glorify God; is, from this point onward, to the very close of the Book, to be the one yet varied subject of the whole narrative: and even then we shall be constantly reminded how much of

it remains untold; how many deeds and words of St Paul are left unwritten; enough to show him as he was, not enough to satisfy curiosity or to supersede research.

The first missionary journey, described in the 13th and 14th chapters, was limited to the island of Cyprus and a small part of Asia Minor. Its chief interest centres in a specimen, contained in this chapter, of St Paul's manner of addressing a Jewish congregation, and in a sample, contained in the following chapter, of his method of dealing with an audience of Gentiles. But for tonight we must be contented with the opening portion of the narrative; telling of the commission itself under which he acted, and of the new powers and capacities with which that commission armed him.

We have already considered the circumstances of that *wonderful conversion* which transformed Saul of Tarsus, the bitter and relentless enemy of the Gospel, into a believer and a Christian. We have traced his steps subsequently from Damascus, the scene of his change and of his Baptism and of his early preaching, into the wilderness of Arabia; thence back to Damascus; thence, three years after

his conversion, to Jerusalem; thence home to Tarsus; thence, under the friendly guidance of Barnabas, to the great city of Antioch; thence on a charitable mission from that Church to Jerusalem; thence finally (in the last words of the 12th chapter) again to Antioch, where a large work of usefulness had opened before him in the regular instruction and supervision of a promising Christian community. It is in the midst of this work that the 13th chapter takes up the thread of his history.

The congregation at Antioch was under the instruction of several *prophets and teachers.* A prophet, in Scripture language, is not necessarily a predicter or foreteller of coming events: he is one who speaks for God, under God's special inspiration, whether for reproof or exhortation or simple instruction. A prophet was an inspired preacher. The gift of *prophecy* in this sense, and the gift of *teaching* which is here associated with it, were among the special powers communicated by the Holy Spirit in His supernatural working in the first age of the Church.

Among these prophets and teachers at Antioch were Barnabas, of whom we have read

and shall read in this history; three other persons, of whom we know nothing for certain besides; and one, greater than all, who was to be the blessed Apostle of the Gentiles, St Paul himself.

On a certain occasion, as the Church at Antioch was engaged in a solemn service of prayer and fasting, an intimation was given, probably through one or more of the prophets then present, which directed the special designation of two of their number to the Apostolical office. *As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate ye row for me Barnabas and Saul unto the work to which I have summoned them.*

The Holy Ghost said. My brethren, these words show us that we do not err in regarding the Holy Ghost as a Person; not a mere effluence or influence from God, not a mere power or operation of God, but a Person; One who has a will and an action of His own, even as St Paul himself says in his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, *But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will.* We do not err in saying Sunday by Sunday, *I believe in the Holy Ghost, The Lord and Giver of life, Who proceedeth from*

the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spake by the prophets. O God the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, have mercy upon us miserable sinners. The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

Separate them for the work. The word is *Mark* them *off*, as by a boundary-line, from all others. It was this injunction of the Holy Spirit, which made Barnabas an Apostle. He was not one of the twelve. He was not, like Matthias, added afterwards to supply a vacancy. And yet we call him, and keep an annual festival in memory of him as, *St Barnabas the Apostle.* The title is from Scripture. The 14th chapter says, *Which when the Apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of, they rent their clothes,* &c. Barnabas was made an Apostle by this special call of the Holy Ghost.

His companion was an Apostle by a double title. (1) He was already qualified for that office, in its original form and sense, by having *seen Jesus Christ* in His revelation to him at the moment of his conversion; and (2) he had received his designation to the office in the

very words used by the Divine Master in announcing the purpose of that revelation. And yet, we find from this passage, there was another designation wanting still. The messenger was standing ready: now he must receive his directions. *Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.*

The work. The ministry is a business. It is not, as some have made it, an amusement or a pastime. It is not, as some would represent it, a title or a profession. It is a work. It was so to Barnabas and Saul. It is so in all times to all who understand it. For what, brethren, was Paul's work? What was it, I do not say in its circumstances, but in its aim and end? Was it not, to *turn* men *from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God?* Was it not, to bring men, individual men, into *the obedience of faith?* Was it not, so to *warn* and so to *teach* men *in all wisdom,* as to *present every man* in the end *perfect in Christ Jesus?* What less, what else, is the aim of the ministry of this place, of this Church? St Paul had to pursue his object amidst opposition and ridicule, amidst obloquy and persecution, amidst danger and suffering: we have a quieter office; to live amidst friends and neighbours,

amidst civilities and kindnesses, amidst religious professions and proprieties of worship: but have these things indeed affected the end and aim of our ministry? Have they made the quickening of consciences, the reformation of lives, the salvation of souls, less of a work than it was to prophets and to Apostles? Nay, are there not difficulties now to be overcome which had no existence then? difficulties arising out of that very softness and civility and complaisance, which at first sight seems to have diminished them?

Brethren, the ministry, like the Apostleship, is a work: the minister, like the Apostle, is, or ought to be, a working man. Will you not help him in his business? not by flattering, not by ministering to vanity or self-conceit, but, on the contrary, by setting before yourselves the object which he has in view for you, the so bringing every thought into obedience to the will of Christ, *that you may be counted worthy to escape all those things which shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man?*

Separate me Barnabas and Saul. The minister is one with you in all the weaknesses and temptations and difficulties of man: he

has no exemption, himself, from any infirmity, of body or mind, of soul or spirit, to which the humblest and the most imperfect are liable: but nevertheless he is, in one single sense, a *separated* man: there is a mark upon him, there is a boundary-line round him, which testifies to his having a definite calling, an express commission, without which he would feel it a presumption and an impertinence to stand where he stands or to speak to you as he speaks. I say not that any of us who now minister could plead a miraculous call or summons of the Holy Ghost designating us for the work of guiding and helping souls. But I do say that I hope there has been something of a real, though less emphatic, utterance of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those who have undertaken it; something enabling them to answer, honestly however humbly, the first question addressed in our Church's Service to all who are Candidates for the ministry, *Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office and ministration, to serve God for the promoting of His glory and the edifying of His people?* And I hope also that there has been to each of us a real meaning in that solemn act of

Ordination, by which we have been separated from all other callings, to the office of *ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.* God give us grace to feel that office more and more deeply as a work, and to understand more and more fully how and in what sense we are separated to it!

Again and again we are reminded in Scripture that God is a God of order; *not the Author of confusion, but of peace, in all Churches of the saints.* The converts in the house of Cornelius were still to have the form, though they already had the substance, of Baptism; still to claim *the washing of water,* though they were already *baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire.* Even so it is here. Even the express designation of the Holy Ghost does not supersede the outward form of Ordination. *While they ministered and fasted,* the Divine call came: *they fasted* again *and prayed,* they *laid on their hands* in solemn benediction, before they sent forth the new Apostles to their work. Let us not sever what God has joined. He who knows what we are, and deals with us as He knows, will have the outward sign as well as the inward grace. We are body and spirit: and they who remember this, in religion as well

as in business, are wisest in that wisdom which is from above. *Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid their hands upon them, they let them go.*

There must ever be something affecting in the departure of a missionary to his work. There is much in the thought of what he leaves; there is even more, when rightly viewed, in what he seeks; to impress and solemnize the minds of those who look on. If that man is not a mere idle dreamer, there must be something real in things unseen. That man is taking with him no instruments of art or of husbandry; he is not seeking fame or fortune in foreign lands; he is not a disappointed man, hiding himself from reproach or contempt in scenes where the eye of man will not follow him: none of these things: he believes himself to be entering upon a work; he believes himself to be carrying a message; he believes himself to be engaged in a living Master's service, and to be bearing a humble part in the establishment of an everlasting kingdom. Unless these things be all cunningly devised fables, that man's going preaches a solemn sermon to us who stay.

But surely of all missionary departures this

upon which we look to-night is one of the most momentous. One of these men *has seen Jesus Christ;* has been turned from one course into the opposite by that sight; has been commissioned by Him to carry forth His name and His Gospel into every part of the earth. And both of these men have received a special summons from the Holy Ghost speaking by men's lips, and then a special ordination for the work on which they go forth. If this be not all a falsehood, we ought indeed to attend to the things which they say.

Starting from the city, followed no doubt by many earnest prayers and blessings from those who stay behind, they take the road towards the sea, and find themselves, after a sixteen miles' journey, at the fortified sea-port of Seleucia. From thence they sailed to Cyprus, the native country of Barnabas; and landed at Salamis, the eastern port and former capital of the island. There, in conformity with the original commission and the constant practice of the Apostles, they addressed themselves first to the Jewish inhabitants of the city. *They preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.* They were accompanied by a younger kinsman of Barnabas; known to us from the

preceding chapter as *John whose surname was Mark;* but known to us better still as the writer of the second Gospel, the briefest of all in its actual extent, but, of all the Gospels, the most full perhaps of those lively and graphic touches which indicate the recollections (whencesoever derived by him) of an eye-witness, as well as of a loving and devoted friend. In this first missionary journey St Mark acted as the *minister* or assistant of the two Apostles; especially, we may suppose, in the task of baptizing those who by their preaching had been brought to believe.

They passed through the whole island, so well known from early days to one of the travellers; and from the eastern capital arrived at length at the western, the city of Paphos, at that time the seat of the Roman government, and as such the residence of Sergius Paulus the Proconsul of the province. The character of this Roman magistrate is described in favourable terms. He was *a prudent man;* a man of capacity, intelligence, and good sense. He showed his candour and freedom of mind by desiring to hear the message of these unwonted visitors; which many men in his position would have regarded as only some new variety of that Jewish superstition which was treated with so

much contempt alike by the rulers and by the philosophers of the time.

But there was an influence at work beside him, adverse to the entrance of the Word of God. We constantly read in those times of persons professing to possess powers of sorcery and supernatural wisdom, and exercising an extraordinary influence over the great men both of the Republic and the Empire. We all know how king Saul, when he felt that God had departed from him, sought the aid of witchcraft to fill the void: and just so was it with men who had never known the true God, when their faith in idol-worship was utterly shaken, and in the instinctive feeling of their own absolute weakness they wanted counsel and strength for the ambiguous turning-points and critical emergencies of life.

Thus it was that even *a prudent man*, like this Proconsul of Cyprus, had with him, at the time here spoken of, *a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew* by descent, whose interest it was to *turn away* the mind of his patron *from* the reception of *the faith*. There they stood before him, the Apostle of truth and the emissary of falsehood; like Moses and the magicians in old times before Pharaoh king of Egypt; each pro-

fessing to have with him *the great power of God,* and prepared to bring the controversy to the decisive test, *If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.* Was not this an occasion worthy of Divine interposition? Could any argument be so convincing, under such circumstances, and before that particular audience, as one which should give instant and undeniable proof that the one combatant was in the power of the other; that He who was with the Gospel was greater, in act and in deed, than he who was against it? Accordingly we find St Paul using here for the first time that miraculous power with which Christ had invested him for the assertion and maintenance of His cause below. *And now, behold, the hand of the Lord (God) is upon thee; and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about, seeking some to lead him by the hand.* The solemn and fearful scene had its due effect. *Then the proconsul, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.*

This was that supernatural power, of which St Paul speaks not unfrequently in his Epistles, as committed to him for the punishment of

bold offenders against the truth of God or the holiness of His Church. In the exercise of this power, in Churches subsequently founded, he speaks of *delivering such an one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the soul might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus;* and warns a congregation, of which he has cause to stand in doubt, that, if he visits them again, he *will not spare.* The words, and the things spoken of, may strike us as severe, as unlike the gracious and loving Gospel: but let us rather accept them as proofs of the danger as well as the sinfulness of sin; as warnings, merciful if they reach us in time, of the certainty of a coming judgment, and of the terrible fate of all those who live and die in their iniquity. If there be any truth in the great verities of judgment and eternity, of heaven and hell, we shall learn to estimate differently all those chastisements, and even all those punishments, by which God, whether in the first days or in our own, has sought to save His people from being finally *condemned with the world.* Surely to leave us altogether unwarned; to allow a man to run to every excess of riot, with health unbroken and conscience quiescent; to suffer strength and prosperity, a good name

and a worldly success, to continue, to the end of this life, to be the portion of those who are *treasuring up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;* to send, in other words, no special warning of danger, until warning itself had ceased to be of value; all this, on the supposition of the truth of a future retribution, must surely be far more stern, and far more awful, in reality, than any number or any weight of Divine inflictions sent upon us while to listen may be to live. We may count St Paul harsh and unfeeling for putting forth his Apostolical powers in the punishment of obstinate sinners: yet surely, if we reflect, we shall deem it a more anxious and a more fearful condition still, to be living, as we live, in an age when no such signs of danger are visible, and when we may, if we will, sin on till we die, till the mercy-seat is empty and the thrones are set for judgment. These days, in which God seems so far from the earth, are more full of terror, to the thoughtful and reflecting soul, than any nearness of His presence testified by personal inflictions of suffering.

The Church itself sought for some centuries to fill the place towards her members, which

the departure of Apostles had left vacant. In one of our own Services we are taught to look back with regret upon times when Church discipline was not yet nominal. *In the primitive Church,* says our Commination Service, *there was a godly discipline, that at the beginning of Lent such persons as stood convicted of notorious sin were put to open penance, and punished in this world, that their souls might be saved in the day of the Lord; and that others, admonished by their example, might be the more afraid to offend.* Those days are passed. Where civil punishment does not reach a man, neither will the censures of the Church touch him. And we believe that He who promised to be with His Church alway has not even in this point left her destitute of His guidance. If the voice of public opinion, informed and influenced (though not yet absolutely swayed) by the voice of God, cannot restrain us, in these days of universal notoriety, from deeds of shame and darkness; neither should we be persuaded though Apostles rose to judgment, or an act of open penance were the consequence of every transgression and disobedience disclosed.

It is well thus: we believe it. But this very absence of punishment is, we say, to the

right-minded, the most formidable of terrors. We fear, and have cause to fear, lest the being thus left unpunished should be a sign of the being *let alone.* We fear, and have cause to fear, lest we be only, like fallen spirits, *reserved* for punishment *unto the judgment of the great day.* We fear, and we have cause to fear, lest we be hardened in sin by present impunity; and lest the warning voice of conscience and of the Word, so long unheeded, should change, without our knowing it, into the verdict of condemnation and the sentence of death.

God grant that this be not so with any of us who now listen! We must hear, and fear. We must judge ourselves, that we may not be judged. In particular, let us accept with humility and thankfulness any intimations which God gives us in our national, domestic, or personal life, of the certainty of His observation, and of the reality of His cognizance. If sorrow comes, if sickness, if anxiety, if distress, if pain, if bereavement, if misgiving and a *heart failing for fear;* let us bless God, even while we suffer, and say, I thank Thee, O God, that Thou hast caused my sin to find me out now, while suffering may be to me amendment, and chastisement repentance. We must look inward and

look upward for ourselves, since none can come back to us from the dead to scare us from the place of torment. We must accept God's signs, as they meet us in the still small voice of conscience and of the Spirit; that so we may not be dismayed when *the sign of the Son of Man is seen in heaven*, and they only can stand who have *loved His appearing*.

LECTURE IX.

THE WORK OF LIFE AND THE END OF LIFE.

ACTS XIII. 26.

David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep.

OUR subject to-night is St Paul's first Sermon.

It was delivered at a place called Antioch, in the district of Pisidia in Asia Minor.

From Paphos, the western capital of Cyprus, he had sailed to the north-west, and landing on the coast of Asia Minor, first visited Perga, a place six or seven miles inland in the district of Pamphylia. At this point, John surnamed Mark, who had started on the mission as the companion and minister of the two Apostles, left them and returned to Jerusalem. It was a sign, no doubt, of faintheartedness or lack of zeal; and as such St Paul at a later time remembered it with sufficient displeasure to

make him refuse at all costs to accept him as his companion again.

It is comforting to know that in days later still the breach was healed. In the Apostle's first imprisonment at Rome, the same person, described as *Marcus, sister's son* (or rather *cousin*) *to Barnabas,* was one of the few, the very few, persons, of whom St Paul writes to the Colossians that they were his *fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God,* and *a comfort to him.* So that, my brethren, in this world of change, there is sometimes a change for the better, God be praised for it; a change to greater resolution, greater self-devotion, and greater constancy. Though it is proverbially hard to retrace our steps, and recover the steep uphill path which alone leads to glory; yet *that which is impossible with men is possible with God,* and He who desires not the death of any sinner, can fulfil even this for us. And thus even the declension, even the unfaithfulness, even the backsliding of Mark on this occasion, while it warns all, need not discourage any: *there is a sin not unto death;* and they who seek the grace of recovery shall by God's mercy find it.

The two Apostles, saddened perhaps by the defection of their comrade, but none the less

strong in their own earnestness and constancy, bent their steps further inland, and reached at last, at a distance (I suppose) of nearly a hundred miles, the town of Antioch in Pisidia. It is said that the site of this place had long been lost to human knowledge, until, within the last thirty years, an English traveller, guided by landmarks which could not mislead, reached a position precisely corresponding with the descriptions of ancient geographers, and *felt, as he looked on the superb ruins around, that he was really on the spot consecrated by the labours and persecution of the Apostles Paul and Barnabas.*

Following that orderly course which they always prescribed to themselves, the two Apostles, on reaching this city, quietly waited for the return of the Sabbath, and then bent their steps towards the synagogue of the Jews. They took their places among the worshippers, and the regular service proceeded. The roll of the Law and the Prophets was brought, according to custom, out of the Ark; a chest placed in every synagogue on that side of the building which was nearest to Jerusalem: the regular lesson was read, first from the Law and then from the Prophets: and afterwards the

rulers or presidents of the synagogue sent a message to the two strangers, inviting them to address to the congregation anything which might occur to them in the way of exhortation.

Upon this St Paul rose, and after motioning with his hand for silence, opened the message which he had come so far to deliver.

Men of Israel, he said, *and ye that fear God;* Israelites by birth, or Israelites by religion; *listen.* And to what? To a formal treatise on Christianity? to a stirring appeal to feeling, or a convincing demonstration of truth? Not this. Rather, a simple rehearsal of God's dealings with His ancient people; a calm recital of the leading topics of the national history; as though to bespeak a favourable hearing, and to give an assurance that his doctrine was old, not new; a fulfilment, not an innovation: and then a brief and simple statement of the actual arrival of the promised Saviour, in the very form and under the very circumstances ascribed to Him by the Scriptures in which they believed.

We can scarcely read this address without thinking of the defence of Stephen. When St Paul heard that address, he was still an infidel and a blasphemer; he had listened to it

at the time unmoved; or, if moved by it, only to increased obstinacy in rejecting and maligning the truth: now he is himself the speaker: and must he not have derived some encouragement, in bearing his testimony, from the thought of that which he had once despised? Might he not say to himself, If I, a person prepossessed and prejudiced in no common degree, a person who even carried bigotry to the length of bloodshed, was at last convinced and converted by the faith which formerly I destroyed; may it not be so with others? May not some of those who hear me be won to-day? May not some, even of those who to-day hear in vain, yet repent themselves hereafter, and *come to the knowledge* and to the acknowledgment *of the truth?*

What could he do better than follow St Stephen's model? He is speaking to Jews: shall he treat them as if their religion was a mere figment of men? as if the Gospel had no connection with it, was not built upon it, did not presuppose, recognize, and spring out of it? Not so. Such a method would be at least as untrue as it would be injudicious. Let a Christian teacher rather seize any elements of good which he may find ready in his audi-

ence. Let him say, if he can, Thus far have ye attained: now follow me onwards. Let him say, Your premises are true: now draw the conclusion. That is just St Paul's language. He says, first of all, *You are not wrong in regarding God as in a peculiar sense your God. I am not going to teach you that Israel had no advantage and no prerogative. The God of this people did, it is quite true, choose our fathers. You have received no vain fable in the record of the Egyptian bondage and the great Exodus. For forty years God in a marvellous way fed and nurtured your fathers in the desert. Yours is a peculiar people. God had it under His charge, in a sense in which He took charge of no other nation. He ruled it, He appointed and He changed its rulers, according to His good pleasure, and for a definite and special end. He cleared Canaan for you: He raised up judges for you: and when at last you would have a king, He found you one; and when for his sins He had removed him, still He chose for you another: and to him He gave testimony; called him a man after His own heart, and promised that of his seed, as concerning the flesh, the Deliverer promised from the beginning should eventually and effectually come.*

God has kept that promise. Of the house and lineage of David He has raised you up a Saviour in the person of Jesus. He gave you notice of Him; a notice near at hand, as well as a notice in the long distance. He sent a prophet before His face, to preach a Baptism of repentance, and to tell, in express terms, of One greater than himself who should follow.

Then, as if warmed by his subject, and resolved not to let them miss the glorious offer which he brought them, he proceeds in this strain of direct expostulation.

Men and brethren, brothers in descent from Abraham, and from Israel; and ye too, who, though not sprung from the root of Jesse, are yet incorporated in the worship and in the ordinances of our people; *to you was the message of this salvation sent forth* from your God. *Be not ye rebellious, like that rebellious house,* of which it must be said, *He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. For they who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, ignorant of Him and* ignorant also (as to any spiritual understanding) *of the voices of the prophets, which are read,* among them as among you, *every Sabbath day, fulfilled* them *by condemning* Him. Though they knew it not, they

were fulfilling by their own act the prophecies of a suffering Messiah. *And though they found* against Him *no cause of death, they* yet *besought Pilate that He might be slain. And when they had thus accomplished all things written concerning Him*—so little had their cruelty availed, that they had at last but fulfilled what had always been written, and unwittingly identified Jesus of Nazareth with the promised Saviour and Redeemer—*they took Him down from the cross, and placed Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from among the dead. And He appeared, for several days, to those who had come up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem;* persons therefore well acquainted with Him, and incapable of being deceived by a mere illusion or semblance of Him; *who are now His witnesses unto the people.*

And we declare to you, as they to the people of Judæa, *glad tidings as to the promise which came to the fathers, how that God hath fulfilled it to their children,* even *to us, by raising up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm*—or, as some read, *in the first Psalm;* for what we call the 1st Psalm was originally a sort of prelude to the whole Book—*My Son art Thou: I have to-day begotten Thee.*

The resurrection of Christ is the solemn attestation of His Sonship. *Declared to be the Son of God with power,* St Paul writes to the Romans, *by resurrection from the dead.* And so the same Apostle calls the resurrection of the body the adoption of Christians. *Waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.* The sonship was theirs before: it was Christ's before: but Resurrection sets the seal to it. The 2nd Psalm is one of our Psalms for Easter Day. Then first was *God's King set upon His holy hill of Zion,* when God, in raising Him from the dead, had as it were said to Him before men and Angels, *Thou art my Son: this day have I begotten Thee.*

And to show *that He raised Him from among the dead as no longer about to return to corruption*—to show, in other words, that *Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more—He hath thus spoken* in holy Scripture, *I will give to you,* my people, *the sure mercies of David;* or more exactly, *those holy things of David,* those sacred deposits of mine in the hands of David, *which are faithful;* which can be relied upon; which will never pass away, because the word of God Himself is pledged to them. *Wherefore He saith also in another* Psalm,

Thou wilt not give Thy holy One to see corruption.

Of whom could such words be spoken in their literal strictness? Not surely of a man, that should *die the common death of all men*, and lie for an indefinite period in that grave which is *the end of all the living;* but rather of One whose coming is not after man; who, though He be very Man, is also, no less, very God; and who, though He may be *crucified through weakness* in regard to His humanity, must yet rise again from death in *the power of an endless life. For David, after serving a generation of his own by the counsel of God* —or else, as the words might be rendered, *after having, through a generation of his own, served the counsel of God;* referring, if so, to the words above, *a man after mine own heart, who shall fulfil all my will—fell asleep, and was added unto his fathers,* was laid as an additional member in the burying place of his fathers, *and saw corruption:* his body underwent the common lot of mortality, and passed through every process of dissolution, decomposition, and decay. *But He whom God raised, saw not corruption.* The words of David in the 16th Psalm were prophetic words. They

not only expressed, as all believing men might express, a sure confidence in the reality of a life beyond death, in which they themselves should hereafter, in God's good time, find a place and an inheritance: they had also a directly prophetic reference to Him that should come; and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ claimed them and justified them as written beforehand of Him.

Be it known therefore to you, brethren, that through this man a dismissal of sins is announced to you; and from all things from which ye could not be justified in (through) a Law of Moses, in Him every one who believes is justified. See then lest there come upon you that which is said in the prophets, Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and vanish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye will by no means believe, if one should narrate it to you.

So then, my brethren, the discourse which begins with Israel ends with Christ. It may be well to avoid needless offence; well to carry our hearers with us, to accept what they are, and lead them forward to what they should be; but the end is one, and but one: they must be brought to Christ: the Gospel must be set before them as the one, the only hope of

fallen, sinful, dying man. Let us look at St Paul's way of preaching Christ; let us look at the Christ whom he preached; and pray God to write upon all our hearts the bright and blessed hope which is bound up in His name.

Through this Man, Jesus Christ, *is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins;* or more exactly, *a dismissal of sins.*

You see what the statement is.

(1) There is the fact of sin. All men, old and young, rich and poor, have sinned. *We have left undone that which we ought to have done; and we have done that which we ought not to have done.* That is sin. Sin is the thing which contradicts God's will and God's command. And sin is a thing which cannot be made not to be. Sin is a fact; a fact true of each one of us: and no regret and no resolution and no effort of ours can make that true fact untrue again. We have sinned. Sin is a fact, and we cannot reverse it.

(2) That fact of sin is not only irreversible, but it also affects us and binds us still. There are many facts, in history for example, which, though true, and therefore unalterable, have no consequences for us. But our own sins are not of this nature. Sin committed

still hangs, still adheres, to the sinner. *It shall come* (to use the remarkable phrase of the Psalmist) *into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones.* It becomes as it were a part of him: he cannot divest himself of it. Not only in its infectious character; not only because it is its nature to spread like leaven through all parts of the being, till the whole is leavened by it: but also in its guilt; in the fact that there is upon him, there is incorporated with him, that guilty thing which cannot go unpunished. And let me add, that Nature, and Providence, and conscience, and the experience of human life, do not, either singly or altogether, give any sure intimation of the probable or possible disseverance of guilt from punishment. There is far more, in each and in all of them, to awaken fear than to inspire hope on this subject. As sin, past sin I mean, still hangs to the sinner, accusing, condemning, prophesying punishment; so, for anything that the voice of Nature in any of its utterances can say to us, we might and we ought to anticipate that its grasp, its binding and clenching power, would be perpetual, would be *without repentance.* I say this, in all truth and in all duty, before I add to the other two particulars—the

fact of sin, and the adherence of sin—the third point which St Paul's discourse adds to these, namely,

(3) The forgiveness, or dismissal, of sins through Christ. This announcement is the Gospel. *That which the Law could not do*, that of which Nature could give no hope, that which all else seems rather to contradict than to confirm, yet that without which man must be a debtor and a prisoner and a convict for ever, Christ has done—God has done through Christ—He has forgiven, He has remitted, yea, He has dismissed sins. So that he who was bound is now free. He who was in his sins is now out of them. He to whom sin clung, as a load and a burden too heavy for him to bear, is now, at the sight of Christ's cross, relieved, lightened, disburdened; ready to run the race that is set before him, to enter upon that service which is perfect freedom. How needful, how reasonable, the inference, *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation? Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish.*

The text itself, though earlier in order, yet, in its Christian application, gives the conclusion of the whole matter. It tells us the duty and the end of him who has first known the blessed-

ness which David himself by anticipation described, when he said, *Blessed is he whose iniquity is forgiven, and whose sin is covered: Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.* (1) The duty, and (2) the end.

(1) *He serves his own generation by the will of God.* Or, *In his own generation he serves the will of God.* The expressions, whichever be adopted, mean the same thing. We may take that of our Authorized Version.

It may seem a humble thing to do: but what else is there for the greatest of us? To serve a generation. We are full perhaps of great projects. We think we can make an impression upon the world. We think that our view of truth, or our way of expressing it, is something original, something novel, something which will affect thought and expression after us. Or we think that the effect produced by our influence, in the things of time or else in the things of eternity, is something which will be permanent: future ages will bless us, and our names will live. I speak the language of the great men of the earth, not as though we ourselves were of them. And it is for the sake of correcting that language. All you can do, the greatest of you, is to serve your own gene-

ration. The next generation will have its own ways of thinking and acting. If anything of yours should survive, it will be but to be criticized, disparaged, incorporated and lost in the new. Do not hope to outlive your time. Be satisfied if you can serve your own generation: and when we have put a very narrow construction upon the word *generation;* when we have made it mean only your own town, or your own parish, or perhaps your own family; you must be satisfied still. It is not for the creatures of a day to affect either universality or permanence.

To *serve* your own generation. Not, observe, to lord it over your generation: not, to stamp your mind or your will or your example upon your generation: but to serve it. How humbling, yet how salutary a description! The greater a man is, the more has he to serve. A Sovereign is but a servant. How much more a tradesman, a lawyer, a physician, a clergyman! My brethren, are we setting ourselves to this service? If it is a humble, it is also an honourable, and even a sacred service. To do good to, to help forward, to promote the present and eternal happiness of, the men and the women and the children, with whom or amongst whom

it has pleased God that we should spend our few days or years on earth. That is the meaning of a generation. It is, the people living at one time. To serve our generation is to promote the welfare, the best welfare, of the persons who happened to live, or rather, whom God's Providence has appointed to live, at the same time with ourselves below. What a summons is this to every possible work of charity! What a motive does this give to diligence in visiting the poor, in supporting Schools, in trying to set forward every effort and enterprize of good! Let me anxiously bespeak your help and enlist your sympathies!

(2) Then finally, after serving his own generation by the will of God, the forgiven man at last *falls on sleep.* We have dwelt upon this expression in commenting upon the death of Stephen. *When he had said this, he fell asleep.* Sleep is the Christian name for death. Why?

i. Because it is a gentle thing. It has already lost its sting, by reason of the forgiveness of sins. *The sting of death is sin;* and he whose sins have been dismissed is set free also from the fear of death.

ii. Because it is a refreshing and a restoring

thing. The weary man wants rest. And the forgiven man, who, in the strength of that forgiveness, has for many years been serving his generation, needs rest: he must *renew his strength* before he enters upon the occupations of *that world;* the world of resurrection and of eternal life.

iii. Lastly, and above all, because it has a waking: because death, to a Christian, is only the gate of life: because, after a pause, he will awake, and *be satisfied, when he awakes, with God's likeness.*

Therefore he who has served his generation according to God's will, when he comes to die, only falls on sleep. He may be laid unto his fathers, and see corruption: that is the common lot of all men; that is the penalty of the universal transgression: but the soul sleeps not; the soul departs to be at once with Christ: and neither shall the body sleep for ever; it too *shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and when it hears shall live.*

Seek forgiveness now. Seek it humbly, seek it earnestly, seek it as the free gift of God. Set yourself, in the faith of that gift, and in the power of the Holy Spirit who seals it within, to serve your own generation, through the

days of your appointed time, by the will of God. Then, when you die, yours shall be a sleep of repose, of refreshment, and unto waking: you shall *enter into peace:* and *if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.*

LECTURE X.

THE CONGREGATION AND ITS DISPERSION.

ACTS XIII. 43.

Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

WE have been reading an address delivered by St Paul, during his first Apostolical journey, at the town of Antioch in Asia Minor. That address occupies a middle place amongst the recorded discourses of the same Apostle. We shall find him, in the next (as also in the 17th) chapter, addressing a heathen audience, to which he could only speak on the basis of reason and Nature. And we shall find him in the 20th chapter addressing a congregation not only of Christians but of Christian ministers,

to whom every part of the Gospel was already familiar. Here, on the contrary, he speaks to a Jewish assembly; an audience with whom he might reason from the Old Testament, proving, by a comparison of Scripture with fact, that Jesus was Christ. He has done so. He has connected his teaching with the history of Israel. He has made David his text—the words of David and the promise to David—and has shown those whose glory it was to belong to his race and to his kingdom, that David himself had pointed to Jesus Christ and to His redemption. At last he draws his conclusion. *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. Beware therefore lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish.*

The close of the chapter gives us an account of the effects of that address upon those who heard it, upon those who heard of it, and upon the fortunes of the Apostles themselves.

And as they, the Apostles Paul and Barnabas, *were going out* from the synagogue where Paul had thus spoken, *they* (the hearers) *entreated that on the next sabbath these words might be*

spoken to them. The contrast drawn in our English Version between the Jews and the Gentiles does not seem to be warranted by the best manuscripts. There was a general wish to hear the subject discussed again. But we are reminded by the words of the next verse, that which has been read to you as the text, that there is sometimes a general wish to hear, without an individual earnestness in following up the things spoken.

And when the synagogue, the congregation there assembled, *was released* from its attendance upon the duty of worship, *many of the Jews, and of the devout proselytes,* those who were Jews not by blood but by religion—we have not yet read of any Gentiles, strictly so called—*followed Paul and Barnabas,* eager to hear more, and to verify by private enquiry the declarations uttered in public: *who* (the two Apostles) *speaking to them,* conversing with them, *urged them to adhere to,* to wait upon, to remain constant to, *the grace* (*favour*) *of God* now made known to them.

And on the next sabbath almost all the city was assembled in the synagogue, *to hear the word of the Lord. And when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and*

began to contradict the things stated by Paul, contradicting and reviling. And Paul and Barnabas spoke plainly and said, To you it was necessary that the word of God be first spoken: but since you repel it, and judge not yourselves worthy of the eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, I have set Thee—thus the Father, in the language of the prophet Isaiah, addresses the Messiah—*for a light of Gentiles, that thou mightest be for salvation as far as the extremity of the earth.* Their own Scriptures warned them that it was the purpose of God to extend the light of salvation beyond any national barriers. The Gospel was designed to be no local or limited religion, the privilege of one nation and of such other persons as might individually join themselves to that nation by obedience to a ceremonial law: it was sent as the religion of all nations, coextensive in its mission with the boundaries of earth itself.

And the Gentiles present in the synagogue, *hearing* the words of the Apostles, *rejoiced, and glorified the word of the Lord;* ascribed to it its true importance and its true dignity as a message from the living God; *and believed,* that is, became believers, by a solemn act of

confession and allegiance; *so many,* that is, *as were appointed unto eternal life. And the word of the Lord was carried about through the whole of the region.*

Success, as usual, provoked opposition. Persecution now set in. *But the Jews incited the devout women who were of honourable rank, and the first men of the city, and raised a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their boundaries. And they shook off the dust of their feet against them,* as a solemn protest against the impiety rather than the cruelty of their conduct, *and came to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost.* So much, and so little, can persecution do! It may put obstacles in the way of progress; but it only stirs into livelier exercise the graces of those who believe.

As many as were ordained (appointed) to eternal life believed. By whom ordained, by whom appointed, to eternal life? Surely there is but One, of whom the words can be written. They belong to the same class of expressions with those of our Lord Himself, *No man can come unto me, except the Father who hath sent me draw him. My Father which gave them me is greater than all; and no man is able to*

pluck them out of my Father's hand. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given me; for they are Thine. There is a great depth here, which cannot be entirely fathomed. This is no doctrine of human invention, but one which lies at the bottom of Divine Revelation. It is one of those *secret things* which *belong* wholly *to the Lord our God;* except so far as it is needed by each one of us, and therefore recognized in Holy Scripture, for the correction of human pride and the awakening of human earnestness. Every man who is saved will have to confess that there was something at work for him before his own free will. He could no more have taken the first step than he could have taken the last step without God. It was of God that he sought God. It was of God that that first spark of desire within was kindled which made him even a seeker of eternal life. Yes, my brethren, the true Christian knows this well. If God had not had a purpose of love towards him, he had never been able to rejoice in His love. All good in man is of God; as much the first stirring of good, as its latest or its largest exercise. This is that truth, that needful, that man-humbling, that

God-exalting truth, which the text recognizes. *That no flesh should glory in His presence.* None can say, I made up my mind to be saved, and therefore I set out, of myself, from that city of destruction which is self, which is sin, which is hell below. God was at work before me, and shall be at work after me. This is that doctrine which brings a man to his knees. Yes, which says to each one of us, If you would be saved, you must ask God to save you. If you are not yet saved, it is because you have not put yourself into God's hands for salvation. It is He who gives the first impulse, and they who read the Word or hear Sermons in the expectation that the act itself will benefit, are leaving God out of His own work, which none can do and live. *No man can come unto me, except the Father who hath sent me draw him:* then let us ask for that drawing! Depend upon it, we are building upon the sand, except so far as we recognize God's will and God's work in the matter of our own salvation. To wait idly till God draws, is folly, is madness, is blasphemy: but to pray for God's drawing, is reason, is obedience, is man's place, man's comfort, and man's one hope. *As many as were appointed to*

eternal life believed. God grant that this brief hint be not lost upon us!

When the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas; who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. I would propose this to you, my brethren, this evening, as your test, as your model, and as your encouragement.

1. Now first, there is a *congregation* before us. It is a wonderful thing, when we reflect upon it; a congregation of worshippers. It differs from every other gathering of human beings, in some important particulars. It is a mixed assemblage. Persons of all ages and of all ranks are here. Persons who meet nowhere else meet here. Persons, alas! who have a grudge against one another, who would avoid one another, who would pass one another by, or speak only to dispute, elsewhere, meet here, and meet without discord. Old and young, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, glad and sorrowful, all are mingled here. The house of mourning and the house of feasting alike contribute their quota to this one gathering. The more you think of it, the more remarkable the scene becomes. In this one place, there is

silence, except from certain authorized speakers, or at certain prescribed points in the proceedings. To the words of a man, one of themselves in nature and in infirmity, all are bound, if they come here, to listen in respectful silence. The first inference which all must draw from such a scene—and it is a scene to be witnessed this day in thousands of thousands of places on this earth's surface—must be, that there is a consciousness in man's heart of a great universal want; and that want is the knowledge of God, communion with God, directions from God how to live here so that an immortal life beyond may be a life of happiness and not of woe. To that want every congregation bears witness. The poorer and the less attractive the service, the louder and not the fainter becomes the voice of that testimony. Men cannot do without a religion, and that religion must have its exercises. Man must worship; as a form, if not otherwise: yet, if as a form, because there is a deep want within which must at least be glossed over, at least lulled, at least pacified, if it cannot be met and comforted and satisfied.

Now therefore let us accept, at least thus far, the witness of the congregation. It is a

remarkable thing, this meeting. It could scarcely be accounted for—this habit, so inveterate, so widely spread, of meeting together for worship—except on the supposition that there is a God, whom to reverence is man's first duty, whom to know is eternal life. And this one supposition condemns us. We do not (it may be) know God, and we do not—alas! it is too probable—in heart and life reverence God. What the congregation does, the individual does not. The want is in him as in them: but it is there as a want neglected, it is not there as a want satisfied.

We may well form a high estimate—we cannot form too high an estimate—of this great institution, which is also the expression of an instinct, of assembling ourselves together in a house of worship. What is done here tells upon the life; yea, upon the eternal life. What is learned here, what is confessed here, what is asked here, what is impressed here, ought to have consequences; nay, it has consequences, whether we will or no. Carelessness of thought here, idleness of attention here, the entrance of the world and the devil into the heart here, still more the habit of irreverence and of open trifling here, does tell, does bear fruit, does

involve consequences, of which none can set the limit or predict the end. When we *come together*, as St Paul says, *in one place*, it must be either *for the better*, or *for the worse*. O, it is not the listening to music, and it is not the criticizing a Sermon, that will answer the purposes or fulfil the responsibilities of this gathering! It is a serious work, this meeting in the congregation: a work in which Angels take an interest, and in which, we can well believe, the spirits of evil are busy with their wiles and with their seductions.

2. But the text speaks of the *breaking up* of the congregation. *When the congregation was broken up.* He who watches from this pulpit the dispersion of the congregation; sees the gradual emptying of this holy place after the words of final benediction, and pictures to himself, ever so roughly, the various scenes to which the worshippers are returning; may well look after them anxiously, and wonder in himself where and how the seed sown is to have its developement; in how many it will be caught away before it has taken root; in how many it will find a shallow, and therefore but a temporary resting-place; in how many it will be choked, as it grows, by cares and pleasures;

in how many—God grant it be in some—it will healthfully spring and grow, and bear its harvest whether it be of the thirty, the sixty, or the hundredfold. When the congregation is broken up this evening, whither will the All-seeing eye track its dispersion? Shall there be any deed of darkness done this night by one who is now sitting before me to hear the word of God? Shall there be this evening around any (that should be a Christian) hearth thoughts of unkindness, or words of dispute and bitterness, to mar the sacred calm of a blessed English Sunday? Or shall there be this night any lying down to sleep unblessed by prayer and thanksgiving, any last thoughts unfit for the Spirit's presence, or any meditations upon the bed in the night-watches such as cannot be *acceptable in the sight of God our Strength and our Redeemer?* Surely, if the sight of a congregation has its solemnity, the sight of its dispersion is more solemn and more anxious still. *Ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils:* alas! are there none who do hold in unholy combination the form of God's service with the reality of a service most inconsistent and most opposite?

In the case here before us, an Apostle had been the preacher; the topic of the Sermon was a new Gospel; and the impression made had been such that the audience would fain bespeak the same Sermon for their next Sabbath gathering. And yet even when Paul preached, even when One greater than Paul preached, the words were still again and again verified, *Some believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not.* It was so then, even as it is now, with the Gospel. When the congregation was broken up, many—but not all—of the worshippers followed Paul and Barnabas to receive a fuller light and a more profound impression. The test of the individual effect was the individual following. Those who were satisfied with the hearing went away when the congregation was dismissed: those who desired to live by it stayed behind and sought a closer converse with the speaker. Is there nothing now to correspond with this distinction? On a Sunday evening, when no special attraction of weather or spectacle draws another way, this Church is largely filled with worshippers: the word spoken is received reverently, and the appearance of many a listener is that of one *almost persuaded to be a Christ-*

ian. The preacher is encouraged to hope *things that accompany salvation,* and the casual observer draws a favourable inference as to the state of religion in this parish and in this town. But apply the test here presented. How many of the congregation stay to follow up the impression? On Sunday morning, still more on Sunday afternoon, yet more still at our week-day Service, the Church is little frequented: the farm and the merchandise, the pleasures of home or the pleasures of society, are found, as of old, sufficient reasons for declining the invitation of the Gospel: this one Service, bright with cheerful light, and varied with beautiful music, is the whole of the religion, to judge by its visible signs, of many of those who now listen. Where amongst us are the *religious proselytes* who *follow* the ministers *when the congregation is broken up;* use, in other words, the opportunities afforded them for a more private and personal instruction, link together the Sunday services by a chain of holy effort and assiduous devotion in the week between, and thus set themselves with all earnestness to grow in knowledge, to grow in seriousness, and to grow in grace?

Paul and Barnabas felt that an attentive

congregation, though a great blessing, is an ambiguous sign. They knew the precariousness, as well as the importance, of the spiritual life, and never rested satisfied with one symptom or one evidence of a serious and strong impression. They spoke to these new disciples, and *persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.* It is a great thing to set out well: it is more to run well: it is more still to end well; to reach the goal of the race, and to grasp the promised crown. We are all reminded from time to time of this anxious difference. A hundred and fifty, it may be, of our young Parishioners have devoted themselves in one body to God in the vow of Confirmation: a large proportion of that number have followed the promise to its natural sequel in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper: but how many of these, we ask and we cannot answer, will be found willing to obey the call addressed to them afterwards, from time to time, to gather together for further instruction in the Word and ordinances of the Gospel, so that they may carry on the work begun, and fulfil the covenant entered into between them and God?

Alas! my friends, it is easier to promise than to perform; easier to make one effort than

many; easier to dedicate ourselves once at the Lord's Table, than to carry on to its completion the vow thus registered in heaven. Some who knelt at those altar-rails a month ago in seeming earnestness, may have defiled themselves already with the world or with the flesh; and, when we would persuade them to continue in the grace of God, will reply to us, whether in sorrow or in indifference, that they never really cared for it; that they have already *gone back* and are *walking no more with Jesus!* These are among the discouragements of the Christian ministry: but the Christian minister who knows himself confesses that he can understand it and marvels not.

May God grant to us who are here assembled His great, His crowning grace of perseverance! Well do we all know, the youngest of us, the snares which are spread on this side and on that for unwary steps. Lusts of the flesh—lures of the world—wiles of the devil—it needs more than one renunciation to overcome all or any one of these. In some new guise, in some unexpected or unsuspected form, each one reappears, lies to us, and bids us run the risk, if it be even to sin and die. Where is he whose armour is proof at all points; who

can both discern the real enemy in the professed friend, and also set him at defiance in the strength of One before whom he once fled and for ever trembles? Let us urge you, and more especially our younger companions in the race of eternal life, to *continue in the grace of God;* to adhere tenaciously to every habit of good once formed; to prayer public and private, to the study of God's Word, to self-examination, to Holy Communion; that so you may not only set out rightly but also end successfully. Let us not turn aside from any ordinance or from any pledge by which we may bind our unstable souls more securely to the Lord. Let us look upon all these things as helps to good. And may He, by whose grace alone any one of us can *endure to the end,* by whose appointment and ordinance alone any of us can attain eternal life, so bless and prosper our course that it may also bring us to our goal; so be with us in our pilgrimage, that we may also reach our rest; and enable us *so to pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal!*

LECTURE XI.

GOD'S WITNESSES.

ACTS XIV. 17.

Nevertheless He left not Himself without witness.

THIS Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against; that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. It was thus that the holy Simeon spoke of the Divine Child, whose presentation in the Temple he had lived to witness. And the ministry of our Lord, both personally and by His Apostles, was a perpetual commentary upon that prediction. By men's treatment of Christ they show what manner of spirit they are of. They who love the light come to the light. They who are of the truth receive the truth. They who are

of God hear God's words. They who are living in sin, they who are crooked-minded and false-hearted, they who trust in themselves that they are wise or righteous or holy, will not come to Christ that they may have life. The thoughts of men's hearts are revealed by the touchstone of the Gospel.

And the Gospel is a Gospel for all nations, for all times, and for all characters. These two chapters, the 13th and 14th of the Acts of the Apostles, give us specimens of the way in which the Gospel addresses itself to all manner of states and conditions of men. The educated Roman magistrate, and the designing self-interested impostor; the Jewish audience trained in the Scriptures, and the heathen mob grovelling in superstitious idolatries; to each and all, the Apostle has his suitable word of conviction and correction; his appropriate reason for believing, and his effectual demonstration that God is with him and in him of a truth.

Another long journey, of about ninety miles, has brought the two Evangelists (for in this character they were acting) from Antioch to Iconium. The same scene was there enacted again. They first seek out the synagogue, and address themselves to those who need only the de-

velopement of truth; those who already possess in the germ that knowledge of which the expansion is the Gospel. *Christ the end of the Law* is the text for these. And persuasively was it handled. A great multitude believed. But here, as before, persecution followed upon success. The bitterest enemy of the Gospel was still the Jew. The Gentile outcast knew his blindness, and was thankful for healing: the Jew could *say, I see; and therefore his sin remained.*

For a long time the Apostles stood their ground. *The Lord gave testimony to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.* The whole city entered, on the one side or the other, into the great question. Men could not then sleep upon the Gospel. It came into a town as a fire; a fire to blaze and to roar, or else to cheer and to illuminate.

At last a decisive moment came. Jews and Gentiles, headed (to their shame) by the magistrates of the place, made a positive assault upon the Apostles *to use them despitefully and to stone them.* This was their signal. *When they persecute you in one city, flee ye into another.* They took refuge from the storm

in the smaller and ruder towns of the neighbouring district. *And there they preached the Gospel.* The Christian is to be bold, but not foolhardy. If actual violence is threatened, he ought, if he can, to carry his word where it is yet unknown.

The site of Lystra is not ascertained. Possibly, like that of the Pisidian Antioch in recent years, it may be disclosed to the patient search of some Christian traveller. But the name of Lystra, and one little chapter of its history—the most important, in God's sight, of all—this is known to us, and we are to revive the recollection to-night.

There was a man in the town of Lystra who had been afflicted from his birth. He was a cripple, and had never walked. On one occasion when Paul was preaching Jesus in the street or market-place—for it does not appear that Lystra had a synagogue—this poor lame man sat full in his view. He attracted the eye of the Apostle, who discerned in him not attention only, but interest too in the things spoken, and that spirit of faith also without which there is no place for healing. Suddenly, and with the voice raised to a tone of authority and of command, Paul ad-

dressed himself to this poor and pitiable object, saying to him who had never known the power of motion, *Stand upon thy feet upright.* To the astonishment of every spectator—most of all, doubtless, to his own—the strength to obey was given in the effort. *He leaped up, and walked.* The effect upon the population was magical. Uneducated and uncivilized countrymen, incapable of abstract reasoning, and fast bound by the chains of a degrading superstition, they could yet understand and appreciate a fact: they could see that a miracle is an intervention, that it bespeaks a presence, and that it has an end: and in their own ignorant way they proceeded to argue from it. *The gods,* they said, *are come down to us in the likeness of men.* Such visits from their deities were events celebrated in their mythology: Jupiter, the chief of the heavenly powers, and Mercury, the attendant and messenger of the gods, were said, in the tales of the country, to have travelled before through that region: and they lost no time in appropriating one of these names to each of the two Apostles. Mercury was the god of eloquence, and Paul was the chief speaker; therefore he must be Mercury, and then Barnabas Jupiter. Next,

these supposed deities must be received with divine honours. It appears that there was a statue, or rather temple, of Jupiter *before their city;* outside its chief gate, as the patron and protector of its fortunes. And this temple had its priest: so, when the rumour of a divine visit spread through the city, it was the business of the priest of Jupiter to receive his patron with due reverence; and he brought animals for sacrifice, and garlands to decorate the victims, to the gate (probably) of the house to which the Apostles had retired, and prepared to *do sacrifice with the people.* The sound of these proceedings at last penetrated within: and the two Apostles, rending their clothes in horror at the frightful impiety, rushed out among the people, loudly protesting and remonstrating against the idolatry of which they were the objects. In few and vigorous words, they plied the heathen crowd with arguments drawn entirely from what is called natural religion. Anything else would have been unintelligible. To speak of Jesus and the resurrection at that moment would indeed have been a *casting pearls before swine.* There is no wisdom in flinging the Gospel headlong before minds and hearts incapable of it. A

man who has brought oxen and garlands to do sacrifice to a fellow-man, must be reproved out of the book of nature, must be turned inward upon his reason, must be brought face to face with conscience, and not presented with an atonement which he will despise, or a Saviour whom he will tread underfoot. Listen then to an Apostle preaching to the idolaters of Lystra.

Sirs, he said, *why do ye these things? we also are men,* human beings, *in like case,* of like nature and infirmities, *with you; preaching to you*—properly, *evangelizing you,* that is, bringing you glad tidings—*that ye turn from these vain things,* from these profitless and senseless idolatries, *to a living God;* to a God, not of wood and stone, and not, like us, of mortal dying mould, but to Him who lives and who gives life, the immortal, eternal, self-existent God; *who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all things that are in them; who in the past generations permitted all the nations to walk in their own ways;* interposed not by any visible judgment, or by any world-wide revelation, to put a stop to human error and to human wickedness: *and yet,* though I thus speak, as if God had suffered

man to walk unwarned or unpunished in his own evil ways, *He left Himself not without witness, doing good* to the creatures of His hand, *giving rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness.*

And by these sayings they with difficulty stopped the multitudes from sacrificing to them. The scene will soon change: with them, as with their Master before them, it was but *Hosanna now, to-morrow Crucify:* but for to-night we will leave them in this momentary lull of suffering, while we think of their words as here recorded, and see whether there is anything for a Christian audience to learn from that elementary view of truth which the text itself presents to us. Whosoever he be to whom the Word of God comes; however little he may know, however little he may believe; whatever be his past history, whatever his present standing-place before God or man; the words are of unquestionable truth, and the words are of incomparable importance, which say to him, as they once said on an Apostle's lips to the idolaters of Lystra,

Nevertheless, even to you, *God has not left Himself without witness.*

It has been perhaps too much the fashion to leave out this topic from our Christian teaching. The Christian minister's business, I know —his one business—is, to preach Christ. He has no right to stand where I stand to-night, except in some true sense he bear Christ's commission. But is he therefore bound, has he therefore any right, to narrow his teaching to some one or two alone of all Christ's doctrines? I do not find our Lord Himself, and I do not find our Lord's Apostles after Him, refusing the topics of what is called (more or less correctly) the religion of Nature. And let me say, there are men who listen unmoved to the persuasions of the Gospel strictly so called, who will yet tremble (like Felix) when a man *reasons* with them *of righteousness and temperance and judgment to come.* These things are the avenues of the Gospel. Less than saving if they stop there, they are yet salutary, and the way to saving.

God has not left Himself, St Paul says, without witness. Even to a heathen man, without or before revelation, God gave witness, gave evidence, gave proof, of His own being, and of His own character. It is an old topic, but not therefore done with. The same

commandment, St John says, may be both old and new; old in date, and new in power; old in communication, and new in conviction. May it be so now, and with us!

1. St Paul says very distinctly that Nature is God's witness. *The invisible things of God,* he writes to the Romans, *from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they* who despise or deny Him *are without excuse.* Men may argue themselves out of anything: and so they may argue themselves out of the belief that this fair world, with its bright lights and its fruitful seasons, its ordinances of day and night, of life given and life replenished, is a proof of a personal Creator: they may say, and with some logical plausibility, that the old argument, inferring a Designer from a design, proceeds in a vicious circle: they may enthrone chance in God's seat, or invest nature with God's attributes, or profess to leave all in doubt, and with a misplaced and spurious humility pretend that they have not the faculty for such research; that they can detect the fallacies of Theism, but are incompetent to replace falsehood by truth: these things may be, for they have been; and

such reasonings are as attractive to the self-complacent, as they are distasteful and distressing to the humble-minded. But we believe that, however difficult to frame into an exact order of premises and conclusions, there is a truth, and an irresistible truth, in the evidence of the things that are seen to the being of an invisible Creator: we can heartily echo the wise saying, *Nature could no more have made me, than Fashion could have made the coat I wear:* we can still look up to the starry sky, and say, It must have had a Maker; we can contemplate the mechanism of a human body, or reflect upon the endowments of a human mind, and say, That wonderful, that fearful existence, is not self-constituted nor self-endowed; it owes its structure and it owes its origin to something, to some One, out of itself; and to that something, to that some One, I give, because I cannot help it, the reverence and the fear and the worship of the thing made to Him who made it.

2. And Providence too is God's witness. There can be no question on which side Providence is, in the great question between sin and righteousness. We can say with perfect confidence to any young man whose course in

life is still undecided for good or evil, There is no doubt that that power, whatever it be, which presides over the course of the world and of human life, is a power which loves righteousness and hates iniquity. If you live morally and religiously, you will live, on the whole, happily; if you live carelessly and immorally, you will infallibly, in the long run, be miserable. Act as if there were no God, or no righteous God, or no Omniscient, or no Almighty God; and though you may not believe that He has anything to do with the matter—though you may ascribe results to accident, to misfortune, to fate, or what you will—those results will most certainly be all against you: you will live to curse the day when you first gave way to temptation, you will live to call (by contrast at least) righteousness happiness and religion peace. Such an experience—uniform, I believe, in its main features, in human life—is a witness of inestimable power on the side of God. Somehow or other, trace it to what cause we will, human life is so ordered that in the long run it is well with the righteous and ill with the wicked. Sin, in a wonderful manner, finds us out. Great crimes bring even the vengeance

of society after them: secret sins destroy health, undermine success, cause perpetual terror, and seldom fail, in the end, to entail disgrace: even little sins, even neglected faults, even omitted duties, make conscience a tormentor, and introduce an element of discord and disquietness into the whole fabric of being. Could we wish for a surer practical demonstration of the personal existence and of the holy character of a Creator and a Governor of the universe?

3. And who shall deny that God, the God of holiness and the God of truth, has a witness also in the human conscience? What is this strange thing within me, which presumes to sit in judgment upon me myself? which undertakes to say to me, *This is the way, walk thou in it;* and, if I walk not in it, goes on to pronounce, yea, to execute, within me a sentence of authoritative condemnation? This thing which is at once I and not I myself; which intimately knows, searchingly scrutinizes, and severely judges, yet which has some one to know and to scrutinize and to judge; this thing which certainly I did not place there, and which however I may disregard and disobey I cannot wholly dethrone; what can I call it but God's witness? It is something which He left within

me when He went into the far country; it is something through which He still communicates with me, still censures, still threatens, still punishes: may it not be, may not this thing which I call conscience be designed to inform me, that there shall be one day a *setting of the thrones* and a solemn Advent and Epiphany of the Judge?

We have touched, very summarily, and in what some may call an old-fashioned way, upon those evidences which God brings, even to a natural man—in a measure, even to a heathen man and an idolater—in attestation of His own being and character. We have spoken of Nature, of Providence, and of conscience, as instances and exemplifications of the saying of the text, in which St Paul declared to his rude audience at Lystra, who knew not the Scriptures, and had never heard the holy names of Christ and of the Spirit, that nevertheless God had not left Himself, even to them, without witness. These elementary evidences are sometimes too much left out or slurred over in our modern teaching. And they lie under all that is more distinctively Christian. It is only a man with a conscience, to whom Christ can call. It is only a man whom Nature has instructed

and Providence has disciplined, who can feel the mercy of a Gospel or see any beauty in a Saviour that he should desire Him. My brethren, have we all learned these elementary lessons? For these also, like the Gospel, may be set aside; may be first disregarded and at last denied. And then, with them, goes all else; all living sense of responsibility, all godly fear, all quickening and sustaining hope. I address some to-night who have perhaps dabbled in infidelity; have touched at least with their first lips the sorcerer's cup, and thought it a manly or an enlightened thing to doubt whether they had a Maker and whether they shall have a Judge. It is a great point gained if they can be brought to see that what they have accounted their glory is indeed their shame. A man who deifies Nature, a man who believes in chance, a man who is blind to Providence and deaf to conscience, is sunk, by his own admission, not only below the least and most despised in the kingdom of heaven, but below the very idolaters of Lystra, to whom (whatever else He might have withheld) God had at least not left Himself without witness.

4. Nor has God, my beloved brethren, left Himself without witness to you. If you

cannot read the countenance of heaven and earth, and infer from the things that are seen the power and glory of the Creator; at least, I am persuaded, you can, in your better moments, see that there has been a hand over your life inward and outward; you can, in adversity if not in prosperity, in sickness if not in health, hear a voice within saying to you, There is an eternity beyond, and eternity must be entered through a judgment. These things, if nothing higher, are God's evidences to you. There has been a hand over you, whatever there may have been in Nature or in the world. Yes, there has been a thought for you, and a care for you, and a guidance for you, altogether out of and perhaps in spite of yourselves. You did not bring yourselves into being, nor can you preserve for one day, by any choice or any providence of your own, the very spark and seed of life. And as the gift, and as the continuance, of being, so also the things which have befallen you; sickness and health, sorrow and joy, failure and success, danger and deliverance, neglect and love; have been rather ordered for you than chosen by you. And not only so; but something within tells you, I am persuaded, how tenderly and

how forbearingly you have been dealt with; that you have not been forgotten in trouble, nor let alone in sin, nor rewarded entirely according to your wickednesses: the lot assigned you has been even more medicinal than penal, and yet more evidently considerate and personal than either. These things your better self confesses to you; and the experience of life has been to you God's witness. To the testimony of nature, and the testimony of Providence, and the testimony of conscience, we add confidently in the last place the testimony of experience.

He left not Himself without witness. Witness to what? We have said, To His own being, and to His own character. To the fact that there is a God, and that He is this and not that; a God of truth, not of falsehood; a God of holiness, not of evil; a God of love, not of hatred. You remember how often these words close a paragraph of the Old Testament prophecies; *And ye shall know that I am the Lord.* Sometimes they end a prediction of judgment; more often still perhaps a prediction of restoring and reviving mercy: but, in either case, this is the end of God's dealings, as there described, with His nation or with His

world, *Ye shall know that I am the Lord.* Even so it is with those evidences of which we have to-night spoken. They are evidences of God Himself. They are to make God known to man. And for what purpose? As a point of theory or of doctrine? as though men were debating concerning the origin of Creation, and a decision was to be given to the question by a sign from above? As a display of Divine greatness, for the manifestation of Him, to end with itself, as possessed of attributes altogether inalienable and incommunicable to man? Not so, my brethren: but for this rather; for this end, which is worthy of God; for this end, which is wholly beneficent as well as magnificent in its working; *This is life eternal, that they might know Thee: That by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.* This knowledge can be communicated only through Jesus Christ; only by the Holy Spirit of God working in man's heart as the Spirit of the Eternal Father and of the Eternal Son. But there are preliminaries and postulates to this knowledge: there is a vestibule as well as a shrine to the heavenly temple; and its first approach is through the gate of faith in a per-

sonal Creator, and individual Preserver, and an all-just Judge. Thus far might a heathen penetrate; let us see that we lag not behind him in the race of truth! And when we reach that first outwork of the holy precincts, and stand there in full view of the unapproachable glory, trembling in the conviction of guilt, and confessing the equity of an expected condemnation; then it is that there comes forth to us from the heavenly portal One like unto the Son of Man, One made in all things *like as we are, yet without sin;* holds forth to us the sceptre of mercy, and bids us enter and fear not; saying to each one as he draws nigh in the full assurance of faith, *Son, thy sins are forgiven thee: By me if any man enter in, he shall be saved: He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.*

LECTURE XII.

THE REPORT OF THE MISSION.

ACTS XIV. 27.

They rehearsed all that God had done with them.

NEVER continueth in one stay is as much the description of human nature as of human life. There is but One *in whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning.* There is but One *the same yesterday and to-day and for ever.* Fluctuation, vacillation, alternation, oscillation, these are the proper terms of superscription for the character as much as for the fortunes of frail, fallible, fallen man. He who was yesterday worshipping may to-morrow be blaspheming. *Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing.* He who was yesterday praising, extolling, deifying the messenger of the Gospel, may to-morrow be disparaging,

reviling, persecuting him. It was so in the life of Jesus: and *the disciple is not greater than his Lord.* Alas! it is too much so even in the Christian's history. This *infection of Nature,* by which nothing human is constant, *doth remain, yea, even in the regenerate.* A man who was to-day half in heaven may be to-morrow the victim, the prey, the very sport, of sin. Let the thought convict, humble, abase us, according to our need!

The inhabitants of Lystra, headed by the priest of Jupiter, had brought oxen and garlands to the gate of the house in which Paul and Barnabas were resting. A wonderful work of healing had created what is now called a sensation in that rude city. Divine honours were the least that could be given to beings thus omnipotent. These two men must be gods in disguise. It was at this moment of popular excitement, terrible far more than flattering for the Evangelists of a pure and spiritual religion, that the address on which we dwelt last Sunday was delivered. Appealing to nothing more than a heathen and almost a barbarian could appreciate, St Paul spoke of a God of creation, who, though He might not constrain man's will, yet desired and de-

served man's reverence, and had taken care not to leave Himself (in the darkest times) without a witness in human life and in the human conscience. In nature, in providence, and in conscience—nay, even in the experience of the individual progress through the wilderness of life to the dark river which bounds without terminating it—God has a witness, and no silent or doubtful one, in the heart of every child of man. The witness may be disregarded, may be gagged, at last may be choked and stifled, in any careless, obstinate, and at last obdurate bosom: but there it is: amidst its remonstrances, or over its remains, man rushes on to the commission of that sin, the end and the wages of which is death.

The calm appeal to that inner witness had its effect at Lystra, and will have its effect, amidst heathens or Christians, wherever it is firmly and gravely made. The act of idolatry was prevented: *scarcely,* with difficulty, yet prevented. The oxen were led back from the house-gates, reserved for another occasion and another object. And now a new influence begins to work. *There came in some Jews from Antioch and Iconium*—perhaps on purpose to counteract and malign the Gospel; in that

spirit of religious bigotry which at last makes persecution a profession, and leads men to spend precious time and undertake long journeys in quest of objects of violence and cruelty—*and having persuaded the multitudes,* proverbially fickle and treacherous in that region, *and having stoned Paul,* in some tumultuous manner in one of the streets or open places within the town, *dragged him out of the city, thinking that he was dead. Once was I stoned,* he says of himself in his 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians, referring to this occasion. He who in earlier days had assisted at St Stephen's martyrdom, abetting that murderous hail of missiles under which he gave his life for Jesus, was now himself the sufferer, and (strange to say) in the same cause. Stephen *fell asleep* under that violence. But Paul had work yet to do for his Master; and therefore, though his assailants thought him dead, and so left him, nevertheless *when the disciples had circled him round,* with words of tenderness, and efforts (no doubt) to restore animation, *he rose up,* as they looked on, *and entered into the city.* He who had been dragged out as a corpse, reentered as a living man. God had work for him, and therefore God brought him

back from the very grave and gate of death. *The life of Jesus* was, in a literal sense, *made manifest in his mortal flesh.* And so, after a night's rest and retirement, observed or unobserved of those who thought they had taken his life, *he went forth on the next day with Barnabas to Derbe.* At that place we read of no special sufferings. The description may seem rather to imply an undisturbed as well as successful labour. *Evangelizing that city*—the tense implies a continued and somewhat prolonged work of communicating the glad tidings in this new place—*and having made disciples of many, they turned back to Lystra and Iconium and Antioch.* Prudence is not cowardice. They withdrew for the moment from those places; but they returned thither. In each place they had made disciples: those disciples must be revisited; not left to fight their new fight alone, or find their way unaided into a life of consistency and devotion. They returned therefore to Lystra and Iconium and Antioch, *strengthening the souls of the disciples* in each place visited before, *encouraging them to continue in the faith, and* urging *that it must be through many distresses that we enter* at last *into the kingdom of God.* And

while they thus used the opportunity of their personal presence, for exhortations and encouragements which might by God's grace for ever be remembered, the Apostles took care also to provide for that continuous shepherding of the flock, without which even an Apostle's preaching might have but a precarious and passing hold. *He gave some,* it is written in the Epistle to the Ephesians, as *evangelists,* as the first heralds of the Gospel; *and some* as *pastors and teachers,* to feed the Church of God, and to build it up in all integrity of faith and practice. So we read that Paul and Barnabas, on this second visit to places already evangelized, *elected* (or *appointed*) *for them,* for the new believers, *elders* (or *presbyters*) *congregation by congregation, and* then, *after praying with fastings,* after a solemn farewell service of prayer and fasting, *they committed them to the Lord,* Jesus Christ, *on whom they had believed.* That was the real safeguard. Men might do something for them: Apostles might plant, elders might water, but the Lord alone could either preserve, or give the increase. And so *they passed through Pisidia, and,* bending their steps southward from Antioch, *came into Pamphylia: and* there

having spoken the word in Perga, they came down (to the sea coast) *to Attalia; and thence sailed back to Antioch* in Syria, *from whence they had been surrendered to the favour* and blessing *of God for the work which they* had now *fulfilled. And having arrived, and gathered the congregation together, they reported all the things which God did with them*—co-operating with them—*and how that He opened,* by their instrumentality, *to the Gentiles a door of faith;* how God had made an opening for the Gentiles to believe. *And they spent no short time with the disciples* at Antioch.

They rehearsed all that God had done with them. This was the first missionary report ever presented. Of late years these rehearsals have been common. Every year at this season meetings are held to receive such reports. And it is well that it should be so; provided that the accounts are truthfully given, and provided that the results be anxiously weighed. But let us observe for our instruction to-night what was the nature of that work as two Apostles wrought and as God did it with them.

1. What was its object?

You all know how ill any work must be done which has not a definite aim. What

would a carpenter's work be, or what would a builder's work be, or what would a lawyer's or a physician's work be, without some end set before it? without having something proposed to it, as the object to be gained by success or lost by failure? If the piece of furniture be properly made, if the house be firmly and commodiously built, if the health be re-established or if the cause be won, then there has been good work performed, and the toil has not been wasted or thrown away. Now too often, in religious matters, this first condition of good work is left out of sight. A clergyman, as it is said, "performs duty:" that is, he has gone through the public service, he has prepared and preached his sermon, he has visited the sick, he has inspected the school, &c. But was that his end? was that the object which he proposed to himself? or were these things only so many means to his end? A serious question: a question of life and death as to a clergyman's own state and hope in the sight of God! Far too often we do make these duties ends: if we can perform our duty (as it is sometimes said) creditably, if we read distinctly, if we preach intelligibly, if we have spent so many hours in visiting our parish-

ioners, if we have got through so many cases of sickness in the day or in the week, we are ready to say, I have done my duty; I have gained my end. And so far is *this* sort of clerical labour better than idleness, that we can almost account it a clear gain if one in whom we are interested has even thus far discharged his office diligently. But who does not see that no amount of labour, thus accomplished, necessarily implies any the slightest sense of the real work of the ministry? Where is the end, in all this? No builder—to resume the former comparison—would satisfy his employer by merely being seen so many hours each day at his work: if nothing came of it, or nothing but crooked walls, leaking roofs, and shapeless windows, it would be no satisfaction to the owner that the tradesman had spent so many days upon his toil, or that health had been sacrificed, or life itself lost, in an undertaking so futile and disappointing. It is even so in things spiritual. He is not a good workman, or a workman who can look for his wages, who has nothing to show for it but his toil. True, in these matters, unlike the other, man cannot by any skill or any devotion secure his object: God gives, and

God withholds; and he who thinks that his own labour or even his own prayer can guarantee success has not yet learned his first lesson in the school of Jesus Christ. But it is one thing to have an object, and another to gain it. Now therefore we would ask again, What was St Paul's object in this or any other Apostolical journey? Could it be more clearly or more forcibly expressed than in his own words at Lystra, *That ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God?* To turn souls—to turn men, in body and soul—to God, to the true God, the real God, the living God—that was his object. Turning, conversion, was and still is the end of the ministry. A clergyman's end is, now as then, to turn men to God. He does not talk of preaching as an end, or of reading prayers in the congregation as an end, or of visiting the sick or of instructing the young as an end: these things, if they are worth anything, are means, not ends: and he who counts himself to have attained because he has been diligent in offering or applying the means of grace, is guilty of the great folly of forgetting the caution which we may read in Scripture, *Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.*

My brethren, if this is indeed the meaning of our office, and this its responsibility, and this its risk of mistake and failure, can any exhortation be more needful than that which bids you to remember its object and to aid its work? If its end is, to turn you, you yourselves, living men and living women, to God Himself, yours surely will be the chief loss and the chief misery if it fails! If the workman who has forgotten or missed his aim shall utterly lose his reward, is not that because you, his charge, are in jeopardy, and because the happiness and the safety of your souls is hanging and trembling in the balance? If the minister is condemned, it will be because you, his charge, are not saved.

The end of the ministry is to turn men to God. If God wrought with Paul and Barnabas, it was proved by the result: men were turned to Him.

2. Now can we add anything as to the method of this ministry?

We are struck by its unity; and we are struck also by its variety.

St Paul appears to speak quite differently to the Jews at Antioch and to the idolaters at Lystra. With the one he argues from the Scriptures; with the other only from the book

of Nature. And how can it be otherwise, if a man is in earnest? Has a physician one remedy, and but one, for all cases? Does he proceed, without enquiry, to apply one mode of treatment everywhere, and expect the recovery of health—which is his object—to reward such promiscuous, such unreasoning, such headlong efforts? Even so it is with the physician of the soul. His first business is to ascertain where men stand; what men know; what men really believe already; how they have used that knowledge, how they have conducted themselves towards that belief, hitherto: till he knows or can guess something upon these points, he can only employ the *bow at a venture*, a sort of tentative treatment, an *if* and a *peradventure*, less than impressive in its effect, because less than authoritative in its tone. To speak to a man of salvation, when he has never been conscious of danger; to offer a man forgiveness, who has never trembled at sin; is to heal the wound of a corrupt nature slightly, to cover up the mischief instead of extirpating it, to comfort a man in his sins instead of rescuing him from them. Till the people of Lystra knew that there was one God; till they saw that men were not fit objects of

worship; till they read in the face of Nature the unity and the majesty and the holiness of a Creator; it was idle to say to them, *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.* On the other hand, those who already possessed, not the evidence of Nature only, or of Providence, or of reason, or of conscience, but the evidence also of a Divine Revelation; those whose fault it was to count themselves safe because God had *taught in their streets,* and because they had duly honoured Him with a ritual and a ceremonial worship; must be instructed out of that Revelation itself as to the sinfulness of sin and as to the impotence of nature, as to the need and the promise and the coming of a Saviour, and told, in the language of a messenger from God in whom they believed, *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: Beware therefore lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets.*

More than half the failures of our ministry arise from inappropriate teaching and from inappropriate hearing. There is a man here in the congregation, as there once was when

Jesus Himself was the Preacher, possessed by *the spirit of an unclean devil.* He comes hither, drawn perhaps by custom, by the usage of others, and by his own; perhaps by a wish to gloss over his lost state; perhaps by an instinctive longing to lull the disquietude of his soul. This man, like the demoniac to whom I have referred, meets Jesus here. Would that it were with him as with the man in the Gospel; a meeting with Jesus unto contact, unto healing, unto dispossession! But too often it is only a hearing of the sound; a confused buzz of words and names; something about guilt, and something about atonement, and something about the mercy of God, and something about the love of Christ towards the fallen and the sin-laden: and the man goes away as he came: what he has understood, he has misapplied; what ought to have been condemning, has been encouraging; what ought to have been the conviction of sin, has been to him the permission to sin on and not die for it: that is what he carries away: the unclean spirit is still there; soothed, calmed, lulled, like the surfeited snake till its next fit of hunger; and when that fit comes, there is the unclean devil still, still alive, still awake,

still omnipotent over the impulses of the mind and over the members of the body. That man ought to have been told of God in conscience, before he was told of God in redemption, of God in grace, and of God in compassion and in exhaustless love. He ought to have been told of a God *not left without witness* even in him; a God whose *wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness;* a God who *hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness.* Till he knows and feels these things, till he has trembled at judgment to come, till he has cried out against himself as a poor condemned slave tied and bound with a chain which is dragging him to ruin, he can scarcely profit, he may even be fatally injured, by the offer of a pardon which he wants not, or of a Saviour whom he will only crucify afresh.

What cannot be done by the preacher—for he is here to proclaim Christ and salvation; he must tell of pardon; *woe is unto him if he preach not the Gospel*—must be done for himself by the individual hearer. Let a man ask himself, Is that word for me? Does that suit my case? Have I any right to take to myself that comfort? Are my sins so grievous to me,

that it is life from the dead to hear of a free forgiveness? Let me take heed: would not that promise, in my dead state, be poison, not medicine? Do not I rather need the Law than the Gospel? Do not I require to be shaken in my sleep, if so be I may escape, with life in my hand, from the devouring flame? God give me the spirit of wisdom in hearing, lest *that which should be for my health be to me the occasion of falling!*

3. Two brief words remain.

The work which God *did with* the two Apostles had, as we have seen, a definite end, and had, as we have seen, a various though consistent method. It had also a careful regard to the carrying on of that which was well begun, both (1) in the form of regular supervision, and (2) in that of well-instructed expectation.

(1) *They ordained elders in every congregation.* It is no mark of enlightenment, but the very contrary, to despise the standing ministry of the Church of Christ. He who is turned to God still needs training. Even he is liable to forgetfulness, to coldness remaining or returning, to ignorance of mind and ignorance of heart, in the things which concern his salva-

tion. It is a comfort to us to be assured that even Apostles recognized this tendency. It is a comfort to us to believe that our assemblies in this place for worship and for instruction had their counterpart, nay, their origin, in the institutions of the primitive Church. We all want reminding, and we all want quickening, and we all want instructing also, in the way of salvation. It is not the one reception of the one great truth, which will secure us from the risk of falling away, or from the risk of being utterly ill *instructed unto the kingdom of heaven.* My brethren, as we, I trust, feel more and more the responsibility of teaching, so do you, after the example of these early congregations, feel more and more the duty of learning. The minister has to learn; and if he do not learn, if he be not daily a learner in the school of God, his ministry will soon become vapid, soon become a vain repetition, soon become a barren and a wearisome form, both to himself and to those who hear him. Even so is it with the congregation. They too have need to learn in the school of God: and the services of this place are designed to help them in learning. God grant that they may ever be furthered by His blessing, without which *knowledge* only

puffeth up, and they who are *ever learning* are *never able to come* at last *to the knowledge of the truth.*

(2) Finally, when Paul and Barnabas revisited the places where before they had preached the Gospel, it was to exhort their disciples that it is only through many afflictions that we can enter into the kingdom of God. I have called this, the carrying on of the work of grace in a well-instructed expectation. Neither our Saviour nor His Apostles ever misled men as to the nature of the Christian life below; that it must be a life of conflict, and therefore a life of tribulation.

Sometimes outwardly. I address some to-night, whose *foes are they of their own household.* By opposition, by ridicule, by hindrances thrown in the way of worship and of obedience, there is still much which the enemies of truth can do to thwart or even to quench the faith of Christ's little ones. Remember, my brethren, who are thus tried, that word *must. We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.* It is necessary; *it must needs be*—to look no further than this one point—even for yourselves. A salvation all easy, all smiling, all flowery, all triumphant,

would be none at all. It is through trial that faith is brought out strong, clear, and pure, in the day of account. No trial, no salvation: no cross, no crown. Have you not found it so? Do not all these things drive you to God? Do not all these things wean you from earth, and fix your eye on heaven?

But, if all these things were withdrawn, still tribulation would not cease with them. Because *from within, out of the heart,* out of the life which is secret and hidden from all but God—thence, if thence only, proceed trials enough to verify the word here written. What is outward opposition, outward obloquy, outward ridicule, compared with the anguish of an indwelling, an obstinate, an ever reviving and ever struggling lust or sin? Which of us, who has ever known such an enemy, would not purchase its defeat at the price of any wrestling with flesh and blood? Yes, my brethren, it is there, it is in the deep of the heart, that tribulation has its home. Who cannot feel with us in that irksome, that miserable, that ever old, ever new distress? Fight on, fight on—brother, sister, in the struggles and in the hopes of the heavenly race—and at last God will give the victory! *Lift up the hands which hang*

down, and strengthen *the feeble knees.* Yield not, or you lose the past: yield not, or you forfeit the future! *Yet a little while*—and then, even as it is written, *through many tribulations you shall enter the kingdom.* And

When the shore is won at last,
Who will count the billows past?

LECTURE XIII.

THE FIRST COUNCIL.

ACTS XV. 31.

Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

Lo, I am with you alway. Such was our Lord's parting promise. *It is expedient for you that I go away,* He had said to His disciples; *for, if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you: but, if I depart, I will send Him unto you.*

And as for other purposes, so also for this; to guide the disciples into all truth; to give them a right judgment in all things, and to enable them so to steer the holy Ark of the Church through the waves of a troublesome world, that it might faithfully represent its Master's character in the three great features *of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*

We are to read to-night of a most im-

portant discussion within the Church itself. And though that discussion has now for many ages been settled and laid to rest, so that it is difficult for us even to enter into its great significance, yet we can still admire in these pages the spirit in which Apostles entered into controversy, and the grace which guided them to a right conclusion: we can still learn from their words, and learn from their arguments, and learn from their judgments: we can still gather for ourselves lessons of calmness and moderation and wisdom, and perceive the reality of that Divine presence which prompted and justified the solemn claim here asserted, *It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us.*

For many generations one country had been the sole repository of Divine truth. If any Gentile wished for spiritual light, he could obtain it only by becoming a Jew. We must endeavour to grasp this strange paradox, or we cannot make due allowance for the difficulties presupposed in this chapter. The first idea of the Jewish Christians was that Christianity was only a developed Judaism, and that only through Judaism could any one arrive at Christianity. They could understand a Gentile becoming a Christian, just as they

could understand a Gentile becoming a Jew: but no more, and not otherwise. When therefore a large admission of Gentiles into the Christian body was becoming every year a more and more marked feature of the new faith, it was not to be wondered at if, as the first verse of this chapter teaches us, the congregation at Antioch was visited by certain persons from Judea—members, no doubt, of the Christian Church at the head-quarters of Judaism—calling upon the believing Gentiles at Antioch to accept the Law of Moses, ceremonial as well as moral, and saying to them, *Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.*

The consequence was a serious dissension; out of which grew the wise and Christian resolution to have the question calmly discussed and decisively settled. Let some representatives of the congregation which had been thus disturbed—and at the head of them those two eminent men whose labours among the Gentiles had been so preeminently blessed—go up to Jerusalem, and there bring the matter to a final issue in the presence and by the judgment of the Apostles themselves.

On their way from Antioch to Jerusalem,

Paul and Barnabas had many opportunities of relating their recent experience of missionary work among Gentile populations. Thus they prepared the way in many Jewish congregations for the reception of that which they felt to be a vital truth. And indeed, my brethren, we can all understand that in that decision which was then pending, the very Gospel itself was at stake. What would have become of Christianity as a religion for the world, if it had been tied for ever to the ceremonial law, and made a mere offshoot of Judaism? And so it might have been, but for Christ's guiding hand and the Spirit's enlightening presence. It was an open question then. And though Paul and Barnabas on their arrival at Jerusalem were favourably listened to, when they told of the work which God had *done with them* among the Gentiles, yet there were those, at Jerusalem as before at Antioch, who openly maintained that the Gospel could not be severed from the Law, and that those who would be saved by Christ must first be circumcised, and subjected to every precept of the Levitical Dispensation.

It was therefore an anxious moment when *the Apostles and elders came together to con-*

sider of this matter. An earnest and protracted discussion kept the issue long in suspense. We can imagine the feelings of at least one person during this debate. With St Paul this was a struggle of life and death for truth. Once append any condition to the faith of Christ; once say that the work of Christ was incomplete without some addition (it scarcely matters what) of outward observance or of human merit; and the Gospel is made void: a half Saviour is none: a salvation which must be completed by man might as well be a salvation originated by man. Either all is Divine, or nothing. God be praised, even by us of this day, for having given such grace to His holy Apostle St Paul, as to set the Gospel of His Son for ever upon a footing of free grace and of unconditional salvation!

But let us praise God also for this; that, though there may have been a difference of opinion on this question in the Church, there was none among the Apostles; and that, though one Apostle may have had at this time more experience than another of the course of the Gospel among the Gentiles, all the Apostles were enlightened to see that the Gospel was for the world; *a light to lighten the Gentiles,* as

well as *the glory of God's people Israel.* Hear what St Peter said on this occasion.

Brethren, ye—the word is emphatic—*ye know that from old days God made choice among you that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the Gospel and believe.* It was in that same audience at Jerusalem, that St Peter had related and justified his own conduct on the memorable occasion of the conversion of Cornelius. He could appeal now to that occurrence as familiar to the assembly which he addressed. *And the heart-knowing God*—a solemn and searching word—*bare witness to them* as accepted with Him, *by giving them the Holy Spirit, even as to us also* on the great day of Pentecost; *and put no difference between us and them, having purified their hearts by the faith,* by the Gospel received of them in faith. *Now therefore why tempt ye God,* why do ye try experiments, as it were, upon His mercy and forbearance, *to put a yoke*—that is, *by putting a yoke—upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we had strength to bear? But through the grace (free favour) of the Lord Jesus we trust to be saved even as also they.* It is through the free favour of Christ, and not by the help of the Law, that

we Jews hope for salvation: the Law will not save us—why put it upon them? A noble testimony! Some presume to speak of St Peter as having had a different Gospel, or a different view of the Gospel, from St Paul: how unjust! Read his Epistles; read this speech in the Council; and say if it be not indeed the same Gospel! Nay, hear his express words at the close of his second Epistle. *Even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you; as also in all his Epistles, speaking in them of these things.* The indwelling Spirit, as He wrought in the Apostles by His holy inspiration, is one Spirit, not many.

The way thus cleared, it remained for Paul and Barnabas to give publicly, as they had already done in more private converse, the narrative of their own Gentile ministry, and of the testimony which God had borne to it. *Signs and wonders* were not then disparaged as they are now. They were felt as God's testimony: a testimony suitable to the age; withdrawn when unsuitable; but, whether seen or read of, accepted by *the children of wisdom* as proofs, reasonable and conclusive, of God's working and of God's presence.

After this plain but unanswerable statement, it needed but one authoritative voice to bring the matter to its right conclusion. There rose one of the Apostles—little known from the Gospels, but possessing considerable weight as the resident Apostle in Jerusalem—and known in all time as the author of the general Epistle of St James—as if to sum up the arguments, and place the question clearly and finally before its judges. He begins by referring to the address of St Peter. *Symeon* (*Simon*) *related according as* (*gave an account in accordance with the manner in which*) *God first visited* (*interposed*) *to take from among the Gentiles a people for His name;* to *show forth,* that is, *the praises of Him who has* thus *called them out of darkness into His marvellous light.* And then he reminds his audience that this was no more than had been predicted in their own Scriptures. The prophet Amos had spoken of a *rebuilding of the fallen tabernacle of David,* which should have the designed effect of making *the residue of men, all the Gentiles, seek the Lord.* It was never intended that the Jewish election should be final, or the Gentile exclusion perpetual. Through Israel the God of all men would seek and reclaim His wanderers. And this, St James

says, is now being fulfilled. What then? Must we so deal with the Gentiles as though they could only find God through Judaism? God forbid. Let us not—such is my judgment—*trouble those who from the Gentiles turn to God;* let us not lay upon them the weight of Israel's Law, or mislead them as to their proper place and footing in the Church of the redeemed: let us only charge them to abstain from such practices as are either morally wrong in themselves, or at all events incompatible with a friendly communion between both sections of the Church. Fornication—a sin lightly regarded among Gentiles—will need to be specially prohibited: there must be no mistake, and therefore no silence, on that matter: it must not be said afterwards that that sin was a thing indifferent: the Gentile Church must receive once for all its law and its commandment on all questions of moral purity or defilement: and in addition to this, let us enforce also upon them such elementary precepts of a positive nature, as are essential to the friendly intermixture, in social gatherings, of the Jewish and Gentile elements within the body of Christ's Church. *Things offered to idols,* though not substantially affected, as materials of common

food, by that offering, had better, for the sake of peace, be avoided by the Gentiles. It is well too that they should thus be kept from all approach to those idolatrous rites from which their former life has suffered so cruelly both in its morality and in its worship. When to these we have added the prohibition of blood, and of animals in which (by the nature of their death) the blood remains, we shall have done all that is required for the entire fusion of the two branches of our Christian community. Less than this would not suffice; for the Law of Moses is ever sounding in the synagogues, and with it a perpetual memento of the obligations and prohibitions of Israel.

Thus ended that memorable Council, on the result of which hung the destinies of Christianity. A decree was drawn up, in exact accordance with the resolution of St James. It was couched in the form of a circular letter to the Gentile Christians in the districts of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. It rehearsed the occasion of its promulgation; an unsettlement of mind on the ceremonial question, arising from the unauthorized representations of persons belonging to the Church at Jerusalem. Referring its readers for fuller information to

the verbal statements of those by whom it was conveyed, Barnabas and Paul, Judas and Silas, it simply enumerated the four special prohibitions suggested in the resolution of St James, and ended by a solemn release from all other ceremonial restrictions whatsoever.

Such was the great charter of the Church's liberties, as finally settled by the mother Church of Jerusalem. Happy had the universal Church been, if a spirit of equal wisdom had always presided in her counsels, or a spirit of equal simplicity been everywhere diffused through her congregations!

Had ours been a different audience, we might have dwelt, not without advantage, upon some grave questions of Church government; upon the importance, yet the precariousness, of ecclesiastical assemblies for defining the faith, ordering the worship, or controlling the irregularities in doctrine or practice, of the universal or of any national Church. In this congregation such questions could scarcely be so treated as to promote godly edifying. It is with humbler and more practical questions that we are here concerned.

1. And first of all, as to the subject here under discussion. How grave a question! how

different from those matters of ceremony and ritual, or from those abstruse metaphysical niceties in the definition of doctrine, which have too often occupied the deliberations, in later days, of the Church and of its world! Here the enquiry was neither less nor other than this, What must men do to be saved? Is the Gospel of the grace of God all that a man need believe? Was the work of Christ alone, in undertaking our sins and becoming the Mediator and the High Priest of man, all-sufficient, or only partially sufficient, for justification and life? What can be a more solemn or a more engrossing enquiry? The Gentile world, of which we all are members, was waiting as it were around that Apostolical council-chamber, to know, for all time, the terms of eternal life. And God guided His first servants to a true definition; a definition which has been the stay and the solace of ten thousand hearts in every generation from theirs to ours. *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,* was the response of that first Council. *We believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved even as they. We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and*

not for our own works or deservings. O, if the answer had been ought else than this, what a yoke had been laid upon the neck of later ages and distant lands! What a schism would have rent the one body, what a discord would have been introduced into the trumpet's most certain sounds! How would the Church of Paul, and the Church of Apollos, and the Church of Cephas, and perhaps the self-styled Church of Christ, have had each its own watchword, its own Scriptures of truth, and its own framework of worship! But He who promised to be with His Church alway, was with her on that day, and made her decisions only merciful, only wise, and only true!

2. It follows naturally to ask whether we are holding fast this decree of the Apostles, setting men free from the yoke of the Law, and turning our whole trust to the grace of Christ. I know that none of us is looking to the Levitical Law for justification. But we must not so treat the Holy Scriptures, as if the form and the substance, the sign and the thing signified, were wholly and always one. Trust in the Law of Moses is now a thing antiquated and gone by: but not therefore has it become impossible to look off from

Christ, or to seek to add something to His one work of atonement and reconciliation. It is not in days of health and prosperity that we can best judge of the groundwork of our eternal hope. So long as life smiles upon us, a mixed and tangled tissue of faith and works, of unchallenged professions and traditional doctrines, is enough to keep off the eye of the soul from detecting the shallowness and the hollowness within. And a dread of morbid self-suspicion, and a right desire rather to do than to feel, and a kind of teaching which deals little with the heart and only superficially and perfunctorily with the life itself, may prevent many well-meaning and well-reputed persons from entering closely into judgment with the plea which they purpose to urge hereafter at the bar of God. Some of those who hear me know already, by painful experience, how different is the confidence of health from the confidence of sickness, the religion of a lifetime from the religion of a deathbed. They have seen earth vanish; they have felt its show fallacious, and its pleasures and riches and ambitions a dream: have they not seen also, in that trying moment, that heaven was less real to them than they had imagined it, and that the loss

of one world is by no means necessarily the gaining of the other? These cases, numerous enough in every congregation to be used confidently as warnings, prove to us all the absolute necessity of shaping and defining to ourselves the personal hope; of being able to make answer to ourselves, in life and strength, as we must hereafter make answer in distress and death, as to the way of salvation, and as to the ground of a sinner's hope towards God. It is well that every prayer breathed by any of us in secret should contain in it the deep heart-felt expression of the plea which we intend to present when we stand before the great white throne. Let us put that plea into words, while yet it can be reconsidered, while yet it can be revised, while yet it can, if necessary, be reversed. Yes, my brethren, let us say now in words, when we kneel down to pray, either this or that. Let us say, if that is our true feeling, *O God, I depend, for acceptance with Thee, upon my freedom from gross sins, upon my innocence of any injuries to my neighbour in word or deed, upon the punctuality of my Sunday worship, upon my liberality in relieving others according to my power, upon my general obedience to Thy law,*

and reverence towards Thy name and word and house. On these things I rely for acquittal and absolution in Thy judgment. On these things; not, of course, without Christ's work, but as making that work available for my individual safety and justification. The very framing of the words will make us shrink from them, I trust, with abhorrence. But, alas! I have only uttered what thousands say even on their deathbeds. Let them say it now, say it openly, say it in prayer to God; if so be they may learn to repent of it, and to say something better and truer and more Christian. And let others say *this;* say it because it is what they mean and what they feel; say it because it is what they would live by and what they would die upon; *O God, my one hope is in Thy mercy; not in anything that I have or in anything that I am; not in what I have done, or in what I have abstained from doing; not in my good works, or right motives, or pious feelings; not even in my faith, and not even in my repentance; but only in this, that Thou of Thine infinite mercy didst send Thy Son Jesus Christ into the world to bear our sins; that He by His obedience and by His sacrifice did perfectly accomplish the work*

of human redemption, and that He now and ever liveth to be the Mediator and the High Priest, the Saviour and the Life, of all who come unto Thee by Him. For His sake, on His account, because of Him, God be merciful to me a sinner! Few comparatively have this entire simplicity of view, this entire unity of trust, and few therefore know all the peace and all the strength involved in the Divine, the heaven-sent salvation which is in Christ Jesus.

3. And thus, finally, we are brought to a single reflection upon the text itself. *When they had read the decree, they rejoiced for the consolation.* What was there to rejoice in? Where was the consolation in that brief, summary, business-like epistle? There was this. It set the Gentile Christians free to *rejoice in Christ Jesus* without having and without seeking and without wanting any *confidence in the flesh.* It taught them that the Saviour preached to them was a complete Saviour; that, if they could but *confess with their mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in their heart that God had raised Him from the dead, they should be saved.* Who now rejoices in that consolation? We rejoice if we hear of an accession of wealth,

an increase of honour, or a new spring of pleasure: we rejoice in human esteem, human affection, human love: but which of us can even enter into spiritual joy? which of us really cares for the offer of a free forgiveness, for the assurance that he is complete in Christ, for the *good hope through grace* of holiness here and of heaven hereafter? These things we relegate to a deathbed: we care not to walk now in that heavenly sunshine; we are contented with the dim twilight of reason, if we love not better still the outer darkness of indifference, folly, or sin. *O that there were such a heart in us,* as could be stirred into joy by the consolation of a Gospel! *Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light!*

Purifying their hearts by faith. Faith alone, which is the sight of the invisible Saviour, can really deliver us from that *corruption which is in the world through lust.* God grant it to each one of us! Then will all that is hateful in us become hateful to us, and the grace of the Holy Spirit will subdue and conquer it for us. Then shall we indeed love what God commands, and desire what God promises. Then at last, *among the sundry*

and manifold changes of the world—amidst cares and distractions, amidst trials and sorrows, amidst losses and separations, beside the bed of the dying and at the open grave of the departed—*our hearts will there be surely fixed, where true joys are to be found,* and in the revelations of a Saviour's love and a Father's home we shall still be enabled, whatever betide, to *rejoice for the consolation.*

LECTURE XIV.

UNITY IN DISUNION.

ACTS XV. 41.

And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the Churches.

A BRIEF and at first sight painful passage lies before us this evening. A difference between two Apostles; a contention, and a separation. Nevertheless even here, as in human life everywhere, side by side with sorrow springs up comfort. God's work goes on, and a deep unity lies under all Christian variances, and at last comes that profound calm, in which all shall rest and all be at one for ever.

We have read of the journey of Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, for the decision of that great question, *How shall man*, whether Jew

or Gentile, *become just with God?* Shall Christ suffice, or shall Christ only assist? Shall we be complete in Christ, or only set by Him in the way to salvation? The answer to these questions was bold and strong. Christ is all. *By grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.* A decree was drawn up in this spirit, and its reception in the Church of Antioch was followed by great joy. *When they read the letter, they rejoiced for the consolation.*

For some time Paul and Barnabas resumed the quiet though laborious office of stationary pastors of the Church of Antioch. But the words of his Divine commission, *Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles,* were still ringing in the ear of Paul, and he began to propose to himself new journeyings in the work of an Apostleship which had the world for its diocese.

After some days Paul said to Barnabas, Let us return now, and visit (*inspect*) *the brethren throughout every city* of all those *in which we* before *announced the word* (*message*) *of the Lord* Jesus Christ, *how* (*in what state*) *they are. And Barnabas planned to take with them also John who was called Mark. But Paul de-*

manded not to take with them him who in their former journey *withdrew from them from Pamphylia and went not with them to the work. And there arose a provocation* (*irritation*, or *exasperation*), *so that they were parted from each other, and Barnabas, taking Mark with him, sailed forth to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas*—or Silvanus; one of the two messengers from the Church at Jerusalem; who, having accompanied Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, and thus fulfilled his special mission, had chosen to remain there in the exercise of his duties as a Christian *prophet—and went forth, surrendered to the grace* and blessing *of the Lord by the brethren* at Antioch. *And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening* (*establishing*) *the congregations.*

Various thoughts will here suggest themselves.

1. St Paul's proposal to revisit the congregations was a proof of his sense of the precariousness of the Christian life. Throughout his Epistles to the Churches we have the expression of the same spirit. He has scarcely left a place, when his anxiety about the well-being of his converts becomes too painful for him to bear. He sends back his only com-

panion, and consents to be entirely solitary in a strange and unfriendly city, if he may but gain the desired tidings as to the stability of those whom he has left behind. It was so already at this early point in his ministry. He says to his former associate in the toils and perils of their common Apostleship, Let us return and inspect our congregations, that we may see how they are. It is a good thing to extend the field of labour, and preach the Gospel where Christ has not yet been named. It is a good thing to form new plans, originate new machineries, and carry the ministrations of the Church into homes and haunts which they have not yet penetrated. But in all this we must take heed lest we be chargeable with not well following up a work which has been well begun. Whether that work be in a house or in a church, in a sick-room, in a school, or in a congregation, it will not be done by one effort, it may need many efforts before one impression is made; and when that impression is by God's grace secured, still it may fade and flag and at last disappear, if it be not vigorously and earnestly and constantly renewed. Therefore the call, *Let us go again and see how they do,* is the call as much of good sense as of godly

zeal. *Let us get up early to the vineyards,* says the inspired Song; *let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth.* We can all admire the ardour with which a burning zeal carries its possessor across seas and deserts *to make one proselyte* to the Gospel. But they who know themselves, who know, in other words, the infirmities of nature and the deficiencies of grace, will respect far more that quiet, unostentatious, plodding steadiness which leads a Christian man or a Christian woman, regardless of discouragement and regardless of dulness, to walk day by day, and week by week, and year by year, the round of some unattractive duty; to be found always at the same place at the same hour, plying over again the task oftentimes defeated, and seeking no reward, either of publicity or of excitement, if but the work once undertaken may be faithfully done, and the promised benediction at last heard, *For my name's sake thou hast laboured, and hast not fainted.* Most of all is this seen in the most directly spiritual ministrations. O how precarious is the work of grace in the most promising of us all! What snares does Satan lay for the young, the newly confirmed, the just awakened, the recently re-

formed and repentant! Well may it be written by the great Apostle, as a reason why a kind as well as firm treatment should be used towards the penitent, *Lest Satan get an advantage over us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.* And well may every minister, following however humbly or however distantly in his steps, seek by all means to maintain and strengthen in those committed to him any work of good which he may hope that he sees begun. So soon is the ground once cleared again overgrown; so soon is the impulse once communicated checked and impeded; so soon is the seed once sown snatched away, or scorched in its first budding, or choked finally in its growth; that there is need daily, both with regard to ourselves, and with regard also to those to whom we are set to minister, to say in the words here before us, Let us go again, let us visit, let us examine, let us inspect the work, in that heart or in that house, and see how it does.

2. We pass to the result of the proposal on the occasion here described. Barnabas shared St Paul's feeling: he too was anxious about the congregations: he too was ready to make exertion, and to encounter peril, and, if necessary,

to face death, in their service. But in settling the details of the enterprise a grave difference presented itself. Barnabas proposed that his young kinsman, John surnamed Mark, should accompany them on this their second journey. We can imagine many reasons for this suggestion. There was a very natural partiality for his own relation. It would be a comfort to him, on a journey full of discomfort and of privation, to have the society of one bound to him by double ties, of nature and grace; always ready to give the help of a younger man to his elders, and to cheer a difficult work by his sympathy and cooperation. Doubtless also Barnabas would urge the importance of a gentle and forgiving treatment towards one whose religious character was still rather forming than established. He might speak confidently of his kinsman's regret for past lukewarmness, and of his earnest resolutions for the future. He might say, Let us not repel the freewill offer of service, nor quench the reviving flame of grace. We must not, in our admiration for St Paul's more rigid rule of duty, refuse our sympathy to St Barnabas's natural feeling and more indulgent hopes. In themselves the two arguments may seem almost equal. In the one

justice, in the other mercy predominated. In the one the Apostle, in the other the man. In the one the interests of the mission, in the other consideration for the person. If St Paul, so tender towards the infirmities of others, so anxious not to *break the bruised reed*, so fearful of driving repentance into despair, saw here a case in which it was necessary to press a measure of severity, we are inclined to suppose—and the Church of Antioch seems to have considered—that he was in the right: but at least it was a case in which both sides had something of right, and in which a difference of opinion ought not to have run on into a variance of spirit. Yet so it was. The words, *the contention was so sharp between them*, may somewhat exceed the strength of the original expression, which is, *there arose a provocation*, or, as you have already heard, *an irritation*, or at most *an exasperation* of feeling, *so that they separated from each other*. But certainly we are designed to see in the statement, however it may be modified, an undue warmth of feeling, and an undue tenacity of opinion, and an undue strength of expression, on both sides; a position in which the man got the better of the Christian, and in which consequently, which-

ever of the two was most in the right, there were faults more or less equal, on both sides; faults of temper and spirit, faults of feeling and of expression. Both were Christian men, and yet both were in this instance exemplifying the Fall.

The faults of Christian people fill a large page in human history and in human life. Even in Holy Scripture, where is the man exhibited as free from all sin, save indeed One only? One who was not only Man, but God also? It is never concealed from us that the taint of nature *doth remain, yea, in them that are regenerate.* The theory of perfection is not a Scriptural, because it is not a true theory. A Christian is one in whom the Spirit of the living God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, lives and moves and works. But that Divine influence does not overbear man's will, nor does it destroy man's nature. As long as we are in this world, the natural may have put on, but it is not yet lost in, the spiritual. And yet this is not so true as to palliate human fault, or to reconcile men to their own infirmities. In so far as these infirmities work, a man is not yet renewed; his struggle is not over, because his victory is not yet won.

The narrative before us exhibits human infirmity in its working in the regenerate. Much might be said for Paul's view, and much might be said for Barnabas's view, on the practical point before them: yet both could not be right in their conclusion, and neither could be right in making it a ground of separation. Paul and Barnabas were both in training for perfection: neither of them had as yet reached it. Many years later one of them wrote—both would to the end have confessed it—*Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.*

But three things I would notice in this history, lest encouragement be given to a state of mind and of life most unchristian.

(1) The first of these is, that the subject of this dissension of Paul and Barnabas was a Christian subject.

They were at variance as to the best way of prosecuting Christ's work. One thought that that work required severity: the other thought that that work was compatible, in this instance, with indulgence. One thought that a man who had once shown a cold and indifferent spirit towards eternal things, a man who had

once *put his hand to the plough,* and then *looked back,* was not fit to be the companion in future of Apostles: the other thought that a man who regretted that indifference, and was willing to repair it by future earnestness, should be invited and encouraged by all the tendernesses of the Gospel. This was the question. It was not, like most variances among Christians now, a dispute which of the two could gain most of the good things of this life. It was not a quarrel arising out of this, that one of the two had gained, what both could not have, of the riches or honours or pleasures of the world. It was not that one had disparaged the ability or the probity or the spirituality of the other, and that this must awaken in the natural mind a resentment to be shown in retort or cherished in malice. None of these things. It was just a difference of opinion as to the best way of serving Christ; a difference of opinion too warmly expressed, too stoutly maintained, and too far followed into its consequences. Happy should we be, most happy, if our faults were only those of an excess of zeal and an excess of tenacity in reference to the work of Christ and the interests of souls!

(2) In the next place, that infirmity, that

error, that fault, of which we have spoken, was redressed in the wisest and best of ways.

It was with the dissension of two Apostles, as with the dispute of two Patriarchs in the earliest times. *Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee; for we be brethren: Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.* Where no divine law compels coexistence, separation is oftentimes the best cure for discord. There is but one relation of life in which severance is sin: in every other, if men cannot agree, let them live apart. It may be a painful necessity; itself a standing witness of the corruption which is in all: but they who cannot do God's work together may for the present do it apart: the world is wide enough; let them *live and let live.* Barnabas will have Mark with him: let it be so. Paul cannot think it right: be it so: let him find another. Difference is not necessarily variance, nor disagreement strife. If two of God's servants cannot see things alike, let them agree to see them differently. If they cannot act together, they can at least believe together, and

hope together, and together love. It is thus with conflicting parties and conflicting sects. It is not necessary that they should fight out their differences: let them differ and be at one. If each has Christ's work and Christ's cause and Christ's glory at heart, they will all be reconciled by the great reconciler: death, which is the gate of heaven, will make *the crooked straight, and the rough places plain.*

(3) And yet once more. In the history now before us we are not left to the great future of all for our hope of reconciliation. Separation was in this case followed—we know it—by concord.

In St Paul's 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, written from Ephesus some five or six years later than the event which we are now considering, St Paul speaks of his brother Apostle in terms fully expressive of their substantial unity; a unity not only in the essential doctrine of the Gospel, but also in the details of their ministerial life. And of Mark we have two notices in St Paul's later Epistles; the one written during his first, and the other during his second imprisonment at Rome. *Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas,* is spoken of, in his Epistle to the Colossians, as one of his few.

fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God, who had been *a comfort to him* in his bonds. And in his 2nd Epistle to Timothy, the latest of all his Epistles, these words occur, as though for the purpose of leaving one latest record of this change and reversal of his earlier opinion, *Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.* He, who was once rejected as having departed from the work, is now declared to be profitable for it, and chosen by St Paul himself as the companion of his last sorrows and the witness of his latest testimony. Time is a great healer: and when time is seconded and enforced by an indwelling spirit, in each, of Christian devotion and Christian love, what may it not do for the reconciliation of those whom circumstances have formerly divided in the service of a common Master?

3. And now that history which we have viewed in its bearing upon man, has its aspect also towards the things of God; towards His Word, and towards His Providence.

(1) The Holy Scriptures are no flattering tale. It is no part of their object to write (in the human sense of the expression) the *lives of saints.* There is no screening, and there is no

palliating, of the infirmities of holy men. The sin of Abraham, and the sin of Jacob, and the sin of Moses, and the sin of David, and the sin of Elijah, and the sin of Hezekiah, each is told plainly; told in its full culpability, and told in its bitter consequences. Even thus it is in the New Testament. The denial of Christ by one Apostle, and the mistrust of Christ by another, and the desertion of Christ by all; the dissimulation of one Apostle, and the error of another Apostle, and the dissension and discord of other two Apostles; each is told simply, told naturally, and told without palliation and without excuse. It is taken for granted that truth alone is in view, and that truth implies the recognition of human infirmity and the disclosure of human sin. If men will make mischief of it, they must. If men will say either, *Because a saint did this, therefore it cannot be sin;* or else, *Because such a man did this, therefore he cannot be a saint;* they are left to do so. The business of the Holy Scriptures, in these respects, is with facts, not with inferences. They intend to describe men as men; frailty as frailty, sin as sin, and grace as grace. They are not so much bent upon enabling us to judge decisively upon the cha-

racter and destiny of the persons whom they delineate, as upon teaching us to hold up the mirror to ourselves, and to see how God judges, and how God punishes, and how alone God forgives and repairs and washes away that sin which is in all of us. And it turns to them for a testimony. That Book which paints not men as either demons or heroes; that Book which tells me just what is true, and teaches me how to rise out of this which is truly the natural man into this which is as truly the Christian man; how to mourn over myself without despairing, and how to deal justly with others and yet not condemn; that I call a true Book: I see there man as he is, and God as He is: I see there a light to my steps, because it describes truly the wilderness which I traverse, and because it shows me how and by what guidance I can traverse it in safety. And if I see that the Book describes all else truly, because according to my daily experience of man and of man's world, then I can believe it when I see that there is one Person, just one, and one only, whom it paints as indeed *without sin; perfect Man,* as much in the blamelessness of His life, as in the completeness of His nature. It had been easy to represent Paul as

perfect, and John as perfect, and Peter as perfect; just as easy in itself as to represent our Saviour Jesus Christ Himself as perfect. To do so, would have thrown a sort of lustre upon the Gospel, as capable of perfecting holiness below, and making *sons of Adam*, by an entire transformation, into *sons of God*. If I see that this is not done; if I see that conversion is not perfected save by a gradual and a growing sanctification; then I can believe that a Book so truthful respecting the Christianity of the Christian is no less truthful in reference to the Divinity of Christ.

(2) Finally, this passage sets before us, not in word but in act, the doctrine and the reality of an all-working and all-ruling and all-restoring Providence of God. Out of evil comes forth good. Out of human infirmity there grows Divine strength. The unity of the work is broken. It is sad; it is discouraging. We say, God has forgotten, or He could not permit such a breach in that temple which is to be all holy. We look again, and out of the one divided there has sprung a twofold completeness. The fountain-head is parted into two streams; of which one compasses one region, and one another. Paul and Barnabas

set not forth as one. What then? Barnabas has *taken Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus.* There he is to wage Christ's battle against the obscene rites and foul immoralities of the Paphian idolatry; and Christ is glorified in it. And Paul? is he thrown back upon a compulsory idleness or a melancholy isolation? Nay, he too has set forth, and not alone. He has *chosen Silas,* a worthy companion in the work of missions; and, *being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God,* he is *going through the regions of Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.* And in him too, in him yet more visibly than in the other, Christ is glorified: we shall read the narrative of his triumphs, and admire the hand of Him who vouchsafed them. Thus in the Gospel cause God works, and man is His instrument. If the infirmity of man hinders here, God will find a way there. Happy they, and they only, who in that cause are willing to be *fellow-workers with God!* Fellow-workers, first in receiving, and then in giving: first in giving entrance to the word of life, and then in recommending, adorning, and diffusing it.

He went through Syria and Cilicia confirming the congregations. O for that strengthening

hand, that animating voice, amongst us! The light which he carried is ours too: the object is as great, the need as urgent, the argument as powerful, and the means the same. Where then is the difference? Is it not in the devotion of the messenger, and is it not in the simplicity of the hearer? Do we speak, like St Paul, as from God, for God, in God, to God? manifesting in our mortal flesh the life of the risen Jesus? And do we hear as men seeking to be informed, willing to be guided, earnest to be saved? May that grace of God, to which St Paul was recommended, be with us also; touching with its holy fire the lips that speak and the hearts that hear! Then shall the words at last be verified in us, *God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

LECTURE XV.

A CRY FOR HELP.

ACTS XVI. 9.

Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

THE Chapter before us is a Missionary Chapter. It tells us of missionary work, and traces to their source missionary hindrances. It tells of the education of a missionary, and of his character, and of his call. It sets before us the real end proposed to him, and the beneficent nature of the influence to be exercised on those who believe.

Paul and Silas had set forth from Antioch recommended by the Church of Antioch to the grace of God. The primary object of the journey was to revisit the congregations of Asia Minor, already converted and established by the previous ministry of Barnabas and Paul.

But we shall see that God designed greater things than these for this journey. Now for the first time the Gospel of His grace was to cross into Europe, and to be brought into contact with new races and a different civilization. But with this we are concerned only by anticipation this evening. We begin with the now familiar names of Asiatic towns. For the second time St Paul enters Derbe, for the third time Lystra; enters with a new companion, but in the power of the selfsame Spirit. At one of these two places—for the sacred narrative says not expressly in which—he finds a certain disciple named Timotheus. If St Paul had a human affection it was for this younger friend. It is one of the many links of natural sympathy which bind us to the great Apostle, to observe how earnestly and how faithfully he cherished to the very end of life the tie now formed, addressing to Timotheus the very latest of all those inspired utterances in which he still communicates with the militant Church below.

Timotheus, you observe, was already *a disciple;* that is, a Christian. St Paul always addresses him as *his own son in the faith;* and therefore we must conclude that he was one of

those *firstfruits of Asia* which his former missionary journey had gathered. We are introduced, by the joint help of this narrative and of St Paul's later letters, into the family home in which the childhood of Timotheus was nurtured. There is a Jewish and Christian mother—the Epistle supplies the name, Eunice—one who having trained her son carefully from his childhood in the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament, had herself too, no doubt under St Paul's ministry during his former visit to her city, been led to a humble and earnest faith in a Saviour revealed in the Gospel. The father belonged to a different race: he was *a Greek*, or Gentile; at most a proselyte of the gate, not one of the circumcision: but it may well have been that he too was a believer in Christ, and that thus there was no jar whatever in the unity of a pious and a peaceful home. The group is completed for us in St Paul's 2nd Epistle to Timotheus by the addition of the name and character of a yet older member. *I call to remembrance*, he says, *the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.*

Every saved soul has its history: and that

history is doubtless as various in various instances as the features of the human countenance. Some, with every disadvantage of birth and education; neglected, or worse than neglected; led astray by the example of parents or by the influence of bad companions; are yet plucked at last as brands from the burning, and trusted with great commissions in the army of the living God. If we knew all, we should probably find that the noblest and most courageous of Christ's servants belong to a different class. Nowhere is there found so clean a life, so pure a heart, or so true a devotion, as in those, who, like Timotheus, have grown up from the first in the sanctities of a Christian home, *have known from a child the holy Scriptures*, and have seen those Scriptures exemplified in the most unostentatious yet most persuasive form, the faith and piety of two generations. These things do not, of themselves, secure salvation; nor does the want of these advantages, blessed be God, necessarily forfeit it. But where these things are, there (the grace of God being added) faith is more stable, feeling more equable, and obedience more consistent.

The character of this young disciple was

attested by the concurrent voice of two (if not three) congregations. Thus, if there was something of human preference in the feeling with which St Paul regarded him, it was at least no foolish fancy; it had a sound basis of conscientious approval, and it had also a more decisive seal in the inward promptings of the Holy Spirit. We read in the same Epistles to which I have so often referred, that there were *prophecies going before upon* him; that is, no doubt, express and authoritative intimations, given to St Paul or others, of the will of the Spirit of God that Timotheus should be set apart and dedicated to the ministry of the Gospel; even as in St Paul's own case there had been a special designation to his first apostolical journey, when *the Holy Ghost said,* by the voice (apparently) of certain of the Christian prophets at Antioch, *Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.*

Nor does the parallel end there. As that Divine nomination did not supersede, in the case of Paul and Barnabas, the imposition of human hands—*When they had fasted and prayed, they laid their hands on them*—so also it was here. *Neglect not,* might St Paul say to

Timotheus in the later days of his ministry, *the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.* Those *elders* of whom we read in the 14th chapter as *ordained* by Paul and Barnabas *in every church* of Asia Minor, were employed in this solemn office of Ordination. The Divine reality is attested by the human sign, and he who has been designated by the choice of God is *sent away* to his work with the blessing and with the commission also of man.

These things we learn from the Epistles. In the history we read only of St Paul's will that Timotheus should accompany them on their mission; and of a preliminary which he deemed necessary in order to his acceptance and usefulness.

With the strong prejudice already existing in Jewish minds against St Paul's supposed disparagement of the Law of Moses, it would have been most unwise—unless absolutely required by truth and by the Gospel—to take with him as his companion one not even incorporated in the Jewish covenant by the ordination of circumcision. Now, had Timotheus been, like another disciple, Titus, only and alto-

gether a Gentile—a Gentile by both parents—St Paul would doubtless have refused to consent to his being subjected to an ordinance, the only meaning of which, for him, would have been, that, except a man keep the Law of Moses, he could not be saved. We know from the Epistle to the Galatians that that was St Paul's conduct in the case supposed. Titus, *being a Greek*—a Gentile, we may conceive, by both parents—was *not compelled*—St Paul refused to allow him to be compelled—*to be circumcised.* The case of Timotheus was different. He had one Jewish parent. By one side he was of the natural Israel. And St Paul never forbad a Jew to be circumcised. Though no longer necessary, the Law was not for him unchristian. It was optional whether he should be circumcised: the choice must be decided by circumstances. He must not trust in the Law, but he might submit to it. If then his usefulness would be fatally compromised by the exercise of his freedom in favour of his Gentile parentage, it was his duty to use it in favour of the Jewish. *They knew all that his father was a Greek:* they would be suspicious therefore of his preference, under St Paul's tutelage, of Gentilism: it was needful, consequently, if

he would be a minister in any sense to Jews, that he should disarm this prejudice. In all this, St Paul was as consistent with himself and with his own practice and principle, as he was tenacious of his great, his celebrated maxim, *I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.*

One great part of the work of this Mission was the delivery to the congregations of the decree of the Council at Jerusalem, setting free the Gentile Churches from all obligations to Judaism and to circumcision: in other words, publishing throughout the length and breadth of the earth that Jesus Christ is all, that we are *complete in Him*, and that they who are in Him *are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses*. The effect of this proclamation of a free and unlimited Gospel was what it had been elsewhere: *the churches were established in the faith, and increased in number daily*. They saw that the Gospel was a world-wide Gospel, and they saw that in Jesus Christ is a full salvation.

In the course which they took, they were guided by express intimations of the mind of the Spirit. They *passed through Phrygia and*

the regions of Galatia. Then was accomplished that work of evangelization to which the Epistle to the Galatians in later years bears testimony. Then was it that *Jesus Christ was set forth before their eyes as though crucified among them.* Then was it that they began to *run well.* Then was it that they *received* St Paul *as an Angel of God, even as Christ Jesus;* and in the ardour of a new affection *would* even *have plucked out their own eyes (if it had been possible) and given them to him.* Not yet were manifested those symptoms of being *hindered that they should not obey the truth;* of regarding him as *become their enemy, because he told them the truth;* of being *entangled again with the yoke of bondage,* and so of being *fallen from grace;* of which he speaks with so bitter a disappointment in the Epistle afterwards addressed to them. Thus far all had prospered. They preached *throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia.*

Then arose hindrances. Their way was accurately defined for them by Him in whose name and strength they journeyed. They *were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia. They assayed to go into Bithynia; but the Spirit suffered them not.* Other work was

before them; and it was as though they were concluded, shut up, unto it. *Passing by Mysia, they came down to* the sea coast at *Troas.* And there the cause of this constraint and of this compulsion began to unfold itself. At Troas *a vision appeared to Paul in the night: there stood a man of Macedonia,* proved to be so by the words which he uttered, *beseeching him, and saying, Cross into Macedonia, and help us. When he saw* (*had seen*) *the vision, immediately we sought to go forth into Macedonia,* we began to look out in the harbour of Troas for a vessel bound thitherward, *concluding that the Lord* Jesus Christ *hath summoned us to evangelize them,* to preach His Gospel to the inhabitants of that region. And that region was in EUROPE.

The form of the petition contained in the text, and which we may declare without exaggeration to be addressed to all of us in the periodical call of Christian Missions, places in a very attractive light the work to which it refers. *Come over into Macedonia, and help us.* The Gospel which we possess, the Gospel which we are called to hand on, is designed by its Author, and is felt by its true disciples, to be the *help* of man. Easy would it be to speak upon this topic, and ready would be the response to such

an exhortation, if we ourselves, we who speak and we who hear, had had experience of the thing spoken of. You would be surprised to observe how full the Bible is of this aspect of the Gospel, and of this view of Him from whom the Gospel is derived. Man wants help; and God, God alone, God in Christ, offers him help, sends him help, ministers to him help day by day.

(1) Instruction is help. We all speak of the helplessness of the blind. See a blind man groping his way from room to room, or from street to street: mark the vacillation of his step, mark the uncertainty of his hand, mark the indefinite, tentative, purposeless way in which he reaches forth for this or that: see how a little child, how a dumb animal, how a lifeless staff, is welcomed as the guide and as the support and as the helper of one thus afflicted: and you will understand what is meant by saying that the light of day, that the sight of the eyes, is scarcely more a pleasure and a comfort than it is an assistance and a help. Now what the light of the Sun is to one who has to move and to work among the things and the persons of this world, that knowledge is, true knowledge, to a man who

has to find his way through the mysteries and through the perils and through the obstructions of this life into an eternal state either of misery or of happiness beyond it. Do not say that there is no helplessness in spiritual blindness. Do not say that a man can walk firmly or act intelligently or journey safely in the things of the soul, of God, of eternity, unless he has some light from above to tell him what those things are, how to be apprehended, and how to be dealt with. Well can you imagine yourself sending a message to an Apostle, or crying aloud to the Saviour Himself, in the very words of the text, Come over to me, and help me! Help me by telling me for certain what I am and where; who is He above me, and what the life beyond; how I can *so pass through things temporal that I finally lose not the things eternal.* While I am ignorant, I am also helpless. O help me first of all by teaching! I want certain knowledge, of things vital to the soul, from One who can say, *We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen.*

(2) And comfort is help. See how the Psalmist cries out for help in his hours of distress. Hear him saying, *Shew me a token for good: that they who hate me may see it and be*

ashamed, because Thou, Lord, hast holpen me and comforted me. Holpen, and comforted. The two things are one. If I could only feel that some one has cared for my soul, it is help at once. It is neglect, it is indifference, it is displeasure and alienation, on the part of One who is everything to me, it is this which disheartens; it is this which makes me feel myself helpless. Let me know, on sure evidence, by infallible proof, that God whom I have displeased yet loves; that God whom I have neglected, dishonoured, contemned, yet desires that I should be saved, is yet my Father, waits for me with outstretched arm, and even before I call is answering; and I can bear anything, I can do anything: the cloud is at once breaking, the palsied limb moves, and the hardened heart softens at that touch into gratitude, hope, and love. It is so for once: it is so when first the Gospel is apprehended as indeed a message of peace from God. And it is so again day by day, often as the cry of the self-accusing rises into God's presence, and finds there a Father and a Saviour and a Comforter, with whom is mercy and forgiveness, and the kiss of a free unbought compassion. The Gospel which says, *On earth peace;* the Gospel which says, *In Him*

we have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins; the Gospel which sets forth Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners, crucified among us, and for us risen; is indeed help for the helpless and life from the dead.

(3) But I well know that there are hearts in this congregation, of which the inward thought is, The help I need most of all is not mere instruction, and not mere comfort, but rather, in the simplest sense, assistance; aid against difficulties, aid against enemies, aid against temptations, too many and too sore and too strong for me: tell me of a help against these, and I will indeed confess it to be a Gospel. Yes, here we touch the vital point. Is there, in heaven or in earth, a help against our own sins? not so much against the back-reckoning of sin; not so much against its remorse, against its misery, against its punishment, but against its power; its prevailing strength; its malignant, subtle, importunate assaults; its force of repetition, its force of revival, its force of holding in bondage, and its force of retaking into captivity, the poor, struggling, yet impotent and at last despairing soul? I well know, my friends, that your hearts are too honest to be satisfied to call anything less than this a

Gospel. I know that you say, If I cannot get free from sin, it is a mockery to tell me that I am free from guilt: if I cannot conquer sin, I am sure that I shall be condemned for sin. Therefore the sacred season which we are now celebrating, the season of Ascension and of Whitsuntide, becomes the practical test of our Christianity. If Easter leads to Pentecost; if, that is, the redemption from guilt is followed by a redemption from sin; if the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ is accompanied by the gift of the Holy Spirit to *make me free from the law of sin and death;* then the Gospel is a Gospel indeed: then I feel that the Gospel is not a comfort only, but a help: then I see myself set at liberty for that *service* which *is perfect freedom,* and preparing for that state of sinless holiness which is *the inheritance of the saints in light.* Therefore, in addition to the help of instruction, and in addition to the help of comfort, I want also a help (in the simplest sense) of strength.

Brethren, beloved brethren, *partakers of a heavenly calling,* bring your Gospel, every one of you, to this test. Has it helped you, is it helping you, to be holy? Do you find, when you have taken to heart its comfort, when you

have prayed earnestly for its forgiveness, that you are stronger against sin? against your sin, be it what it may? against that hasty temper, against that suspicious, that morose spirit, against that foolish, trifling, worldly disposition, against that uncharitable, that censorious tongue, against that secret, that malignant, that obstinate lust? It ought to be so: it was meant to be so: it has been ever so with true Christians: is it so with you? The cry for help must never stop short with consolation: it must run on to strength. And the honest heart knows this. What makes a true Christian love his Gospel is, that he finds strength in it. Desire earnestly to have it so, and it shall be so to you.

Then will you understand, and then will you welcome, that cry from the uttermost parts of the earth, a cry often unconsciously uttered, yet audible and persuasive in the ear of the true Church, *Come over to us, and help us.* Then will you rejoice and bless God if He enables you to bear any, the humblest part, in answering that call. You will not seek to evade, you will hail the opportunity: you will say to yourselves, *So much from so little?* Souls helped, perhaps saved, by an almsgiving

which costs me nothing? Nay, by God's help, it shall cost me something! I shall be the richer by how much soever I am the poorer! He who is permitted to give to the destitute, lends to the Lord: will the Lord deal deceitfully in his repayment? God give us grace not to bargain with Him and not to barter; but to give Him first *the offering of a free heart*, and then the offering of *a cheerful giver!*

LECTURE XVI.

THE GREAT PRELIMINARY.

ACTS XVI. 14.

Whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

WE read last Sunday of the first summons of the Apostle into our own Europe. In the visions of the night St Paul saw the figure of a stranger, proved by the words uttered to be a Macedonian, standing and praying him, in terms brief but emphatic, to come over into Macedonia and help them. Without this express call, there might have been some hesitation in undertaking so remote and so uncertain a mission. But he whose work was altogether God's work, and whose life was committed entirely into God's hand, saw in this incident an intimation of duty which he could not and

certainly would not resist. *When he saw (had seen) the vision, immediately we sought to go forth into Macedonia; concluding that the Lord hath summoned us to evangelize them.*

In this quiet and unobtrusive manner we are first made aware, by the mere change of a pronoun, that we are henceforth (though with large intervals) reading the narrative of an eye-witness. Immediately *we* endeavoured. St Luke then joined Paul and Silas on this occasion at Troas. In common literature we much admire a biographer who keeps himself in the back ground, and lets his subject speak. Shall we do less when an Evangelist is the author? We shall respect him for his silence about himself; and we shall draw from that modesty an additional confidence, rather felt than argued, in the trustworthiness of the narrative and the simplicity of the intention.

We owe much, every one of us, to St Luke the Evangelist. But for him we should never have heard, humanly speaking, of Simeon and Anna, *waiting for the consolation of Israel;* of the raising of the widow's son at Nain; of the *woman that was a sinner* in the Pharisee's house; of Mary and the *one thing needful;* of the Parables of the unjust steward, of the rich

man and Lazarus, and of the prodigal son; above all, of the penitent dying malefactor, of the disciples journeying to Emmaus, and even (as to any of its graphic details) of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. These were among his special contributions to the Gospel history. And but for him what should we have known of the early history of the Church? Who but he tells us of the great day of Pentecost, of the conversion of St Paul, or of the admission of the first Gentile convert? And who but St Luke gives the narrative of that wonderful life now before us? the life of one who counted not existence dear to him, save in so far as it enabled him to win souls to Christ, and to accomplish by an unexampled self-devotion *the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God?* It is in this last character, as the inspired biographer of an inspired Apostle, that we are now especially to contemplate him.

What we know of his personal history (apart from that of St Paul) is briefly told. It is summed up in St Paul's own words in the salutations which close the Epistle to the Colossians, written during his first imprisonment at Rome, *Luke the beloved physician, and*

Demas, greet you. I know not that tradition has added much that is certain to that brief designation. Our own Church is contented with that one feature in his history, when in the Collect for St Luke's Day she has instructed us to pray to God as having *called Luke the Physician, whose praise is in the Gospel, to be an Evangelist and Physician of the soul;* and to ask of God *that, by the wholesome medicines of the doctrine delivered by him, all the diseases of our souls may be healed.* The most real benefactors to the Church have not always been the most obtrusive. Oftentimes we owe most to him of whom we know least. It is thus in this instance.

Now therefore for the first time St Luke is added to that sacred company, of which it is written that the risen and ascended Jesus *gave some as Evangelists.* We gather that *the Lord hath called us to evangelize them. We sought to go forth:* we looked out in the port of Troas for a vessel bound thitherward. The vessel is found; and Paul, Silas, Timotheus, and Luke, set forth in quest of new labours in a world unknown.

The lofty island of Samothrace, known in heathen mythology as the abode and watch-

tower of gods, is passed in their short and prosperous transit between the coasts of Asia and Europe. The next day Neapolis, a Macedonian town, the haven of Philippi; and from thence, at ten miles' distance, the important position of Philippi itself; are successively reached by these first heralds of the Gospel. Philippi, known in all history as the scene of the last overthrow of the Roman Republic before the Roman Empire, is described as *a colony;* that is, one of those military stations by which Rome protected the frontiers of her dominion, and in which the constitution and government of the sovereign city were faithfully, though on a small scale, imitated and reproduced.

And we were in that city, St Luke says—or rather, *in the city itself,* as distinguished from a spot without its walls which is afterwards visited—*abiding certain days.* At length the Sabbath arrived. *And on the sabbath day we went forth outside the city, beside a river, where prayer was accustomed to be;* that is, where it was usual on the Sabbaths to hold a meeting for worship; *and we sat down and began to speak to the women who had come together* for that purpose. What an example, my friends, for ministers of the Gospel, and for all persons

engaged in any work of good, not to count any audience too small, or any circumstances too discouraging, to admit of the prosecution, on a particular occasion, of their labour of love! St Paul, if he had been as one of us, might have said, as he looked round his little congregation at Philippi, *Only a few poor women! It is not worth while to spend my strength in such paltry toil.* But St Paul had his Saviour's Spirit in him, and counted nothing small by which he could benefit one person or save one soul. And therefore he had his reward.

And a certain woman, by name Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, a worshipper of God, was on this occasion *a hearer* of our words. Among this little Jewish congregation, consisting entirely, on this particular day, of women, was one person, not a native of Philippi, but belonging to the Asiatic city of Thyatira; a place famous for its purple dye, in which it carried on an extensive trade with foreign and distant lands; yet more famous to a Christian student for that record which stands among the Epistles to the Seven Churches in the Revelation of St John, and which teaches us how rapid may be the decline, in a Church or in a soul, from grace once given and from

light once received. It may have been in the exercise of her worldly calling—such is the mystery of God's Providence—that this person had been brought to Philippi for the saving of her soul. She was already a worshipper of the true God, according to the Law and Scriptures of Israel: and on this occasion she had gone out, as was doubtless her custom, for the sake of joining in the Jewish worship. *In the way of Thy judgments have we waited for Thee.* He who would find God must seek Him. He who would receive new light must use the light he has; and he who puts himself out of sight of heavenly things has himself to blame if he does not see them.

This person was a listener while Paul spoke. Mark what follows. *Whose heart the Lord* Jesus Christ *opened, to attend (give heed) to the things which were being spoken by Paul.* (1) There were others hearing, but she attended. (2) And that attention was of God. The Lord opened her heart to attend. (3) And once more, having said that the heart was opened to attend, there is no need to add that the heart was opened to believe. To attend to that which is true, and which brings proof of its truth, is to believe it. It was thus after-

wards at Berea. *They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so: therefore many of them believed.* We pass at once, in the case now before us, from the attention to the Baptism. Her heart was opened to attend; *and then she was baptized and her household.*

The question is asked, and I think reasonably, Were there no children in that household? Does not the language rather imply the faith of the parent dedicating the children, than the separate act of several consenting minds? We just point to it, without dwelling upon the question, as affording, like many other passages, a reasonable confirmation of our Church Article which says, *The Baptism of young children is in any wise to be retained in the Church, as most agreeable with the institution of Christ.*

The first fruit of the new conviction was kindness, hospitality, charity. *When she was baptized, and her household, she entreated, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord,* if you have been so far satisfied of my sincerity and of my faith, as to admit me to the ordinance of incorporation, *come into my*

house, and stay: and she constrained us. She would take no denial. The strangers to whom she owed her very soul, must be made welcome to the comforts of a Christian home in that foreign and for them disconsolate city. *Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained Angels unawares.*

Soon that home was to be exchanged for a prison. But the Christian confessor must be prepared for either fortune: he must enjoy what God gives, when and while he can, and find in that refreshment of spirits strength for the alternative of suffering. These are the vicissitudes of life: most of all, in those who give most to Christ; who have devoted themselves to a Gospel service, and whose only desire it is that they may *finish their course with joy.* Let us, who know no such vicissitudes, at least enquire of ourselves whether in the comforts of society and of a home we are honouring Christ by the devotion of a heart and of a life?

This then was the origin of the Church of Philippi. This was the nucleus of that community to which St Paul addressed, some ten years later, one of the most beautiful and one

of the most comforting of all his Epistles. You see how much, under God's hand, may spring out of how little. One poor woman, and she a foreigner and an alien in that city, has her heart touched by Divine grace in listening to a Gospel sermon. She gives the first house and the first household to the Church in that place. From her and hers the light spreads, till it illuminates a whole region. Who knows but that from her also may have sprung the evangelization of her native city? and that thus two Churches, Philippi and Thyatira, may have been the eventual produce of this one river-side conversation? It is thus in all times: the real work of God is done in individual hearts; and then it spreads forth, from mind to mind and from soul to soul, till, as it is written, the Saviour can *think upon Rahab and Babylon,* upon *them of Tyre with the Morians, among them that know Him.* Very animating, and very admonitory too! It is not in splendid gatherings of the half-hearted, it is rather in some secret wrestling with Satan hand to hand in the lane and in the chamber, that the minister of God is most sure that he is doing God's work, and most hopeful that He who *sees the end from the beginning* may be pleased

to bring a whole family or a whole congregation of the saved out of that obscure, that generally discouraging labour.

Whose heart the Lord opened. So then, besides the work of the minister, and besides the work of the hearer, there is also another work necessary, without which the other two will be of no avail.

I am not about to enter into any doubtful or unprofitable speculations. I am not about to discuss the difficult questions of free grace and of free will, in such sense as to adjust the balance between the two agencies, the agency of man and the agency of God. Still less do I purpose to enquire how we are to reconcile God's Omnipotence with God's justice on the one hand, or with God's goodness on the other. Least of all shall we ask what is the numerical proportion between the saved and the lost, between those who are rescued through grace and those who are ruined through sin. It is a very grave and a very practical point to which I would direct your thoughts, beloved brethren, to-night. If there be any such thing as a Divine agency in man's heart, essential to man's salvation, it must be important that we should recognize it, that we should seek it for our-

selves, and that we should so seek as that we may also find.

It is said of this first hearer of the Gospel from St Paul's lips at Philippi, that the Lord Jesus Christ opened her heart to attend. Thus attending, the result was faith; and that faith led at once to Baptism and to a Christian life.

1. The Lord opened her heart. Then the heart was before closed. What does that mean? Surely that there is a natural indisposition to the things of God. An indisposition not incompatible with much that is amiable and lovely and of good report. Not implying, as a matter of course, habits of open sin or a noticeable spirit of frivolity and trifling. These things may be or may not be. Inclinations vary: what is one man's pleasure would be another's pain: what would be self-indulgence to one is self-denial and self-mortification to another. We cannot judge conclusively, by these signs, of a man's state towards God. Under the moral man's respectability, under the amiable man's affection, under the outwardly religious man's worship, there may lurk a deep, settled, at last inveterate, repugnance to God Himself; an unchanging resolution to keep God out of sight while it can be done; a fixed determination

not to come to close quarters with that *sword of the Spirit* which must pierce and wound before it can be safe to heal. Among the hundreds who compose this congregation this evening, I dare not think how many may, while I speak, be listening with closed hearts; listening, that is, without any real desire to give the word entrance; listening with something inside their hearts which must go if God comes, and which they are not willing to dismiss or to let go. In short, there are men and women here present with a bosom sin; cherishing some habit which they know to be immoral, or some feeling which they know to be idolatrous, or some temper which they know to be unchristian. And these persons, though, like her of whom we are reading, they hear; and though perhaps they go so far as to listen; and though perhaps they go so far as to approve what they hear, and to like what they hear, and to praise what they hear; yet never let the word in: there is an inner secret self, inside the one which is listening, at which the word never arrives and into which it never penetrates. Thus they come, and they go; and they come again, and again they depart; and the heart never opens. Christ knocks at the door, but

they leave Him outside: they will not rise for Him nor let Him in. They do not open to Him, because they are enlightened enough to know His terms, and honest enough with themselves to decide against them.

And without this; without this definite reason for disliking Christ; there are other influences at work in keeping the door of the heart closed against Him. In one there is a spirit of levity which makes all serious reflection irksome: the world has not yet turned to bitterness for him, and he would fain enjoy himself while he can. *Not yet, not yet,* is his cry to the Saviour and to His Gospel: *when I have a convenient season,* in other words, when sorrow comes, or sickness, or the near prospect of death, then *I will call for thee.* And without any calculation or any resolution of this kind, there is in the heart of man a postponing and a suspending power, a strength of practical procrastination, which is enough of itself to keep the heart closed against Christ: the very absence of resolution against Him assists the practical exclusion. A man is so nearly a Christian; so little hostile, so little unfriendly, to the Gospel; that he writes himself *not far from the kingdom,* able at any moment by a single step

to cross into it. Thus he too has a closed heart; a heart closed by the very idea of its openness.

And then, to pass over a thousand forms and shades of difference, there is yet one other case, by no means uncommon, as I believe, among the hearers of the Gospel. I mean the case of those described in one of St Paul's Epistles as *ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.* I speak of these with all tenderness, with much sadness. There are some who, with a real desire to be saved, can never grasp, throughout life, the simplicity of Christ's salvation. They have either never heard, or never apprehended, the gracious freedom of the Gospel offer. They have mixed together the promise of life with the necessity of repentance: they have been told that it is in vain to come to God without repentance; that they must first repent and first believe, if not first amend and first be holy, and then God will receive them; that, so long as they feel sin, or the love of sin, strong in them, they are only mocking God and deceiving their own souls by seeking Him: and by this medley of things true and false, by this inversion at least of important truths, by this mixture of conditions and preliminaries and prerequisites with

the Gospel of free grace, they have been so perplexed, and so put off, and so discouraged and daunted, that the work of faith has been impossible: they stand afar off, wishing and waiting, instead of *taking the kingdom of God*, as our Lord says, *by force*, and *pressing into it* with a resolute conviction. This has been the effect of erroneous doctrine: in this case a misapprehension of the Gospel has kept the heart closed. O for a voice to sound in the depths of that soul the true, the everlasting, the Divine Gospel! to say, The Gospel is this: not that, if you will do something, God will do the rest: not that, if you will bring repentance, God will give pardon; if you will bring faith, God will give grace: but that, even as you are, dead (it may be) in sin, God loves you; that, however far from home, God is your Father; that, however guilty, however sinful, however unworthy of the least of all His mercies, still you are God's child; and that the work of your redemption and of your salvation is already done for you in Christ. Take God at His word: believe Him when He says that He has laid all your sins upon Christ: try the experiment of coming to Him on that basis: and to you, as to thousands before you, the promise shall be fulfilled:

in the very act of stretching out the hand, the strength will be given: in the reception of the glad tidings, the stony heart will be taken away, and a heart of flesh shall replace it: out of the Gospel, not before it, will spring repentance and reconciliation: and the heart, closed against all else, will yield to the inward summons of an atonement already made and a peace already purchased.

2. We have passed insensibly into the second half of the subject; the opening of the heart which before was shut. This opening is ascribed here to the Lord; that is, to our Lord Jesus Christ, acting through the instrumentality of Him whom He promised to send to His disciples from the Father. I will not enlarge upon the method of this opening. Its methods indeed are various as God's agencies and God's attributes. In the case before us, the first hearing sufficed. As the Jewish proselyte sat and listened, her heart was opened to attend. And it has been so with others. The first sound of the Gospel has entered some hearts. More often, perhaps, the opening is gradual. These hearts are very hard, very obstinate, very incredulous, very unimpressible. If God gave but one chance, who could be saved? But

He who *desires not the death of a sinner;* He who *will have all men to be saved;* He who will do anything for our salvation, except that one thing which would vitiate it altogether, namely, a constraint and compulsion of conversion; that God, I say, is patient with us, bears long, and tries many means: sometimes a sudden influx of blessing, of earthly, human, domestic blessing, has brought with it a softening of the heart and a turning of the whole man to give thanks and to glorify his Benefactor: sometimes, more often doubtless, the discipline of life in its sterner aspect has wrought reflection, and sorrow for sin, and earnest calling upon God; and he who was bold and reckless in prosperity has been brought home to his Father, penitent and humble, by the stroke of a chastising rod. These things are all various. But, amidst them all, one thing varies not. There is a Divine Spirit, the Holy Ghost, one with the Father and with the Son, proceeding from the Father and from the Son, who works the great change wherever it is wrought; who alone touches the very spring of being, and quickens the dead soul into newness of life. Wherever a heart is really opened, it is the Lord who opens it, and He opens it by the Spirit.

My brethren, among the many reproaches which lie upon the Church of Christ, this surely is of all the greatest, that it has almost lost out of its first elements of truth the doctrine and the faith of the Holy Spirit. The idea of an Atonement is familiar to all: we are all jealous for it: and how indeed can a sinner be otherwise? how, save in the blood of Jesus Christ, can we find either hope or cleansing? But who really believes in the Holy Ghost? Who really expects, who really prays for, who consciously experiences, the inward working, still more the inward abiding, as a perpetual safeguard and a perpetual comfort, of the Holy Spirit of God? Easter we all feel to be something to us: but this blessed festival of Whit Sunday, who thinks anything of it? Its holy doctrine is far above us, and therefore we let it lie far below; we disregard, we trifle with, we do despite to it.

God grant that it be not so with us! I do not believe that there is any comfort comparable to that of this one revelation. I do not believe that there is one soul here present, which is not conscious of its need of it. Which of us even fancies that he can either teach himself, or guide himself, or convert himself, or

comfort himself? Which of us does not know by bitter experience that, *when he would do good, evil is present with him?* that, when he would attend to the things which concern his peace, his thoughts fly off to any trifle? that, when he would pray, his heart is silent? that, when he would believe, he doubts, and when he would be holy, he is then most sinful? These experiences should make us value *above gold and precious stone* the promise, the express, the long-tried and ever-faithful promise, *I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever.* That is what we want: a holy, an Almighty, a patient and loving Friend, to live in us; to take charge of us in mind and soul and spirit; to be as near to us as a man's soul is to himself; to preside over every step and regulate every thought; to recall us when we stray, and to raise us when we falter; to be in us *a spring of water, springing up,* day by day and hour by hour, *into everlasting life.* O, put not from you this which would be strength to you and peace and happiness at once and for ever! There is no condition but one. *Your heavenly Father will give His Holy Spirit,* not to them that deserve, but *to them that ask Him.*

LECTURE XVII.

TERMS OF SALVATION.

ACTS XVI. 31.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

IN one sense the Bible, and each Book of the Bible, is a complete whole. It has a unity of purpose and plan; and to parcel it into minute portions is to detract something from its perfection. In another sense, each portion, however minute, of the sacred history has its completeness, and the more microscopic the inspection, the more satisfactory will be the result.

It is thus with the passage now before us. It is in itself an epitome of the whole history of the Gospel. This one scene at Philippi represents to us what the Gospel is in its opera-

tion in all time upon the hearts and minds of men; whether of those who are saved or of those who perish.

You heard on Whit Sunday of the first conversion at Philippi. A woman from Thyatira was a member of that little congregation by the river-side, to which an Apostle did not think it beneath him, or a waste of time, to preach the word. As she listened, the Lord opened her heart. The first result was attention; the attention of the understanding, and the attention of the spirit. The second result (if indeed it can be separated from the first) was conviction: she believed; she felt the truth of what she heard; it commended itself to her conscience; and she was not one of those who, when conscience speaks, let the still small voice *pass by them as the idle wind, which they regard not.* She believed, and therefore obeyed. She brought her household with her, and was baptized into the Church of Christ.

There is great interest for a minister, and surely for his people also, in observing what is here presented to us, an Apostle waiting for openings. St Paul could not command success. St Paul had to drop the precious seed of the Word at random, *not knowing whether should*

prosper, either this or that. He was not listened to by admiring crowds, rushing to destroy their idols and to give themselves for ever to the Lord. One woman was the firstfruits of Philippi: if more are to follow, it must be through circumstances and opportunities not yet disclosed.

It happened that there was at Philippi one of those unhappy persons who were under the influence, and indeed subject to the possession, of an evil spirit. There has been much speculation upon the nature of this possession. A glimpse is given, in the very expression itself, of the nearness to us all of a kingdom of evil; and a solemn warning surely with it of the wisdom and happiness of being so preoccupied, all of us, by the Holy Spirit of God, that the devil, when he *cometh,* may (as it is written of One greater than man) *have nothing in* us. I cannot doubt that it is the intention of Holy Scripture to convey the idea, in these cases, of an actual possession: not of mere delirium, not even of madness in its most aggravated form, but of possession; of a condition in which the bodily and mental organs of a human being were held in thrall by an evil spirit; so that the voice should be the voice of a man, and yet the

words the words of an unclean devil. It is not for me to say how nearly present experience may give us the knowledge of this terrible phenomenon. Doubtless in many living men and women there is now something of this double personality. Wherever there is an overmastering passion, whether of intemperance or evil lust, there is ever found this disunion and discord within: the person *would do good,* and yet *evil is* so *present with* him that he cannot. Sin brings division wherever it comes: it destroys that unity within, which is the peace of the soul: it makes a man at war with himself, because he is first at war with his God. Therefore I say—and the experience of many who hear me will confirm the word—that we can even now go a long way towards the understanding of that Satanic possession of which the Scriptures tell. The notion of possession is not strange to us, whatever the doctrine of possession may be. And certainly nothing could have so brought to issue the great strife between Christ and sin; nothing could so have proved to ignorant or scoffing bystanders the power of Christ over the whole empire of evil; as those miracles of His and of His Apostles after Him, by which a demoniac was delivered

from his possessor, and brought, out of raving and torturing madness, to *sit at the feet of Jesus, clothed,* tranquillized, *and in his right mind.*

Such a person was that damsel at Philippi, who met Paul and Silas as they went to the place of prayer by the river-side. The wickedness of man had turned her unhappy condition to a mercenary account. The evil spirit which possessed her was *a spirit of divination.* It enabled her (as we should say) to tell fortunes. And her owners—for she appears to have been a slave, and not only so, but the slave of a body or company of masters—had contrived to make a large gain of this power: it was a speculation, and a successful one; so that they were directly interested in the continuance of that miserable connection with the kingdom of evil from which the power itself was derived.

Alas for the selfishness of men! What is agony to one, is the gain of another: and where is he who can forego in the smallest particular his own gain, that he may benefit, or that he may refrain from injuring, the soul or the body for which, as for his own, Christ Himself died?

This poor maiden used to follow Paul and his companions on their way to the place of

prayer, crying, *These men are servants of the Most High God, who announce to us a way of salvation.* Just as the devils are said by St James to *believe that there is one God, and tremble;* just as the demoniacs in our Lord's lifetime below were wont to cry before Him, *I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God;* even so it was now. The maiden possessed with a spirit of divination loudly proclaimed the mission of these heralds of salvation. There was an overmastering influence at work within, which testified to the grace which it refused and repelled.

But this sort of testimony was bitterly painful to one in whom the Spirit of God dwelt. This Gospel preached by an evil spirit; this confession of truth by one for whom truth comes too late; this constraint of mere power and mere terror, making one who is lying in chains of darkness proclaim to others how to escape from them; wounded the holy and loving heart of St Paul more than any opposition or any cruelty. He turned at last, and in the name of his Divine Master bade the evil spirit to come out. He came out, and with him all hope of future gain for those who had made a traffic of the possession. *Her masters saw that*

the hope of their gains was gone. Instead of rejoicing that the fatal snare was broken and an immortal soul delivered, these men could only look at their own selfish interests and count over the loss of base lucre which the change had brought with it for them. Such, my brethren, is selfishness, *when it is finished;* when it has reached its full developement, and is seen in the repulsive flower, or in the bitter nauseous fruit. Such is selfishness. A thing which makes a man regret another's salvation. A thing which makes a man first traffic in another's ruin and then mourn over another's escape. God keep us all from its first risings: for indeed it is a fearful thing to know its later effects.

Nothing could now be done by these selfish, these wicked men, but to revenge themselves upon the human instruments of this miraculous cure. They seized upon Paul and Silas, and brought them before the magistrates, on the double charge of creating a disturbance in their city, and of introducing innovations in their religion. The population of the place was easily excited against two Jewish strangers; and the magistrates gave sentence that it should be as they desired. They themselves rent off

the prisoners' clothes, and issued the cruel order to their officers to inflict upon them the disgraceful and savage scourge. Then, all bruised and bleeding, they were handed over to the jailer with a special charge for their safe keeping. The jailer acted duly upon his instructions: he thrust them into the inner prison, and forced their feet into the stocks. Thus, under a false charge and without a trial; with all the sense of injustice fresh upon them, and all the misery of present suffering to keep the wound open; they are left to pass a night—and they know not how many nights may follow it—in the cold and darkness and hunger of a Roman prison, and to ponder alike the danger of their position and the discouragement of their work.

There must be something in the Gospel, and something in the love of Christ and the consolations of His Spirit, if two men, like ourselves by nature in body and mind, could endure patiently, much more endure joyfully, circumstances so painful and so depressing. The well-known words, *And at midnight Paul and Silas* in their dungeon *prayed and sang praises unto God*, have a sweet music in them for anxious and troubled souls. The thought of

those *songs in the night;* verses, perhaps, from our own sacred Book of Psalms, so full of appropriate words for the prisoner and the captive; of those prayers in the jail of Philippi, which have been the example and model of so many Christian confessors and martyrs in all times in their long hours of patient suffering for the truth's sake; may well both encourage and shame us; encourage us by its testimony to the living grace of Christ, and yet shame us by the comparison of our luxurious softness with their noble endurance and their bold confession.

The prisoners heard them. The original language says, *were listening to them.* Strange unwonted sounds must those have been, those prayers and those hymns, in a heathen prison-house: well might they listen! Their attention thus fixed on the remarkable, the unearthly character of these two inmates of the prison, they could not but connect with them and their fortunes the extraordinary scene which followed. *Suddenly there was a great earthquake; the* very *foundations of the prison were shaken;* every door opened, and every fetter was loosened. The jailer himself, *awakened out of his sleep and seeing the prison-doors open*—aware of the

consequences to himself of what he could not but think inevitable, the escape of his prisoners—flew directly, as Romans were apt to do, to the thought of suicide as the readiest escape from the troubles of that only world in which he believed. *He drew his sword, and was about to kill himself.* It was one of those prisoners themselves who kept him from executing his purpose. Instead of profiting by the confusion to effect his escape, St Paul could look also upon *the things of others,* and use the precious moment to save a life and to save a soul. *Do thyself no harm,* he cried, *for we are all here.* The extraordinary thoughtfulness which thus expressed itself; the terrible excitement of the moment, stripping off all the disguises of habit and education, and bringing the soul itself face to face with reality and with destiny; and amidst and above all, the grace of God working of His good pleasure; wrought in a moment the work of years, and made this rough Roman soldier, using the phrase of a religious and spiritual earnestness, ask of these his own prisoners the question ever accompanying salvation, *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* He addresses them at once as his masters—so profound the impression of their connection

with the strange events of the night—and he speaks of himself as a lost man needing salvation. To suppose less than this; to imagine him to enquire only what he must do to escape from the danger of the earthquake and of the opened jail; is to make the narrative as incoherent as it would be trifling. The answer shows, if working else, that, along with and by the help of the terrors of the outward scene, there was working in this man's heart, ignorant as it was and hitherto careless and selfish and sin-bound, that first doubt, that first consciousness, and that first stirring of life, which makes a man aware, as never before, of the reality of a judgment, an eternity, and a wrath to come, and eager to find some way of escape from a future which he feels to be all ruin for one who has died in his sins. *What must I do to be saved?* We can all fill up that question. We can all see that it means, *How can I be saved from a condemnation which must light at last upon all sin? How can I a wicked man stand before God in the day of judgment? How can I hope to escape that everlasting fire, of remorse and anguish, which must consume in the end those who have all their lifetime fought against conviction, against*

repentance, against grace, against God? Is there any hope—if I find it betimes—for a sinful man to become just with God? Is there any thing that I can do to get rid of this overwhelming load of guilt which lies like a millstone about my neck, and threatens to sink me like lead in the mighty waters of a righteous judgment? And O, if there be such a thing as a forgiveness for past sin, is there, is there any such thing as an escape out of the bondage of sin into the freedom of holiness? out of the death of nature into the life of God? What must I do to be saved?

So cries the hardened transgressor in the day when judgment first flashes upon him. So cries the thoughtless lover of the world, in the day (and does not the day come?) when pleasure turns to ashes in the mouth, and vanity to bitterness in the soul. So cries many a human heart, in childhood and youth, in manhood and age, in the day when the still small voice speaks within, and reminds of a Father's love slighted and a Father's home deserted. *What must I do to be saved?* And there is an answer to that question: an answer still vocal, still audible, eighteen centuries after it was first uttered and listened to in the Apostle's jail at Philippi:

an answer still effectual, if it be received with the heart; but capable, like all truth, of being negligently accepted or idly trifled with or unthankfully trampled underfoot by those who will: the very answer contained in the text, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*

Then indeed it was listened to. The soil was prepared for the seed: and in the ground of a quickened earnestness, a devout attention, and a reverent and godly fear, the seed *took root downward and bare fruit upward* unto life eternal. As the jailer heard the word spoken in that inner prison, by men whose feet the night before, as he thrust them in with violence, he had rudely *hurt in the stocks;* heard it with his family gathered around, that the good work might spread and have free course and be glorified; a sure though secret operation of the Divine Spirit gave energy to the word; opened the understanding to understand it, and opened the heart to attend and to believe; and that very dungeon which had resounded with prayers and songs amidst distress and torture, now witnessed the first offices of Christian charity and the administration to many persons of the initiatory rite of Christian

baptism. *He took them in that hour of the night, and washed them from their stripes; and was baptized, himself and all his, straightway.*

Some tardy feelings of a reasonable compunction, or perhaps the experience of the earthquake and the tidings which reached them from the prison, led the magistrates who had hastily condemned, as hastily to reverse the decision of yesterday. They sent in the morning to order the release of the two prisoners. But Paul, who was as firm on occasion in asserting his rights of Roman citizenship, as he was patient in submitting on occasion to their infringement; who knew, in short, when to press and when to relax his human rights as God's Providence and God's Spirit pointed in this direction or that; now declined to accept a secret and surreptitious release from a place marked by God's hand for a glorious triumph of the Gospel. The discharge itself was a confession of injustice: let the Gospel, let Christ Himself, be openly honoured in it. Let the magistrates come themselves, and supplicate the indulgence of their prisoners. They have done a cruel wrong: let them at least say, in the face of the people, that the messengers of the Gospel are no malefactors, and that the

word which they preach is no message of insubordination or of immorality. When the world is brought for once to the foot of the cross, it becomes not the ministers of Christ to forego the avowal of His triumph. The magistrates *feared when they heard that they were Romans, and came and besought them, and requested them to depart from the city.*

The work of God was well begun there. The seed was cast into the ground, and men might *sleep and rise, night and day,* secure that that Divine seed would now *spring and grow up,* though they *knew not how.* The Church of Philippi was now safely planted: and therefore they might now say, like their Divine Master Himself, *Let us go into the next towns, and preach there also: for therefore came I forth.* With all quietness and all dignity they chose their own time: *they came out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.*

What must I do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. We have touched upon the question: let us not separate without an endeavour to understand the answer.

My brethren, there are those who tell us that the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is a worn-out creed; a religion which has had its day, and must be replaced by one more suitable to this later age and to this advanced civilization. Alas! that we cannot all rise, even in a Christian congregation, and say as with one voice, *The Gospel is not obsolete, for it has saved and regenerated me!* That would be the best of answers to the infidel's taunt: and it is just the answer which we cannot return. O for that inward power which alone in any age opens hearts to listen! O for that *grace preventing and following,* which alone turns the dead page into a living and a quickening Spirit! It is not the Gospel which is obsolete: it is we who have lost the key to it. It is not the cross of Christ, or the risen life of Christ, which has lost its power: it is we who make the one an excuse, and the other a phantom. Let the keen two-edged sword cut deep; let the fabric of a self-righteous morality break down within; let a sinner, about whose sin there is, to himself at least and before God, however it may be in the eyes of the world, no mistake and no evasion, have to look death in the face, and to settle, once for all, whether there is for him person-

ally any hope or none; let these things be, as they are, for one or another, taking place every day in every town and every village of England; and you will soon see whether the healing virtue is gone away out of the blood of Christ: you will find that, in those crises and emergencies of the spiritual life, it is as much wanted and as available (blessed be God) as ever: what the insolence of youth and the presumption of prosperity has spurned, is *life from the dead* to him *who knows the plague of his own heart* and the defilement of his own nature: again and again, as each year runs its course, the *balm of Gilead,* the consolation of the Gospel, is tried over and over in cottages and in palaces, and when truly tried, never found wanting: it is found by experience, though of necessity that experience is not public but private, not gregarious but individual and personal, that a sense of guilt, an accusing and condemning conscience, which nothing else could soothe, has been soothed by the blood of sprinkling; and that a fetter of evil habit which nothing else could break off, has been broken off, as by the earthquake in the jail of Philippi, by the grace of Christ's cross and by the power of Christ's resurrection. The question, *What*

must I do to be saved? has been answered again and again by the brief exhortation of the text, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*

But for one who either asks that question earnestly, or receives that answer decisively, thousands put off the one, and thousands play with the other. Of all those whom I address in this house of God this evening, how many have really settled that great, that chief question, *Have I any hope for eternity? and what is it?* The very knowledge of the answer, the very orthodoxy of our creed, the very familiarity of our faith, make it more than ever a temptation to postpone seeking salvation. What can be done any time is done never. That Gospel which, to be worth anything, must be a free Gospel; a Gospel for the most guilty, and a Gospel for the most sinful; is made nugatory for us by its very freeness: *O*, we say, *a deathbed will be time enough!* And thus that which would be life to us now, is made death to us by its abuse: and the Gospel itself, the glorious Gospel of the grace of God, is made despicable to the doubting and scoffing world by the fault and the sin of us its professors. If a congregation like this could say, collec-

tively and individually, *The Gospel has saved us: the Gospel has saved me;* the world could not stand against it. But we come here week after week to dally and temporize and trifle with the Gospel; at best, to keep our hold upon it; at best, to prevent its utterly escaping us; at best, to secure a sort of claim upon its deathbed consolations: and what is the effect? What can be the effect, save this? that the world calls our Gospel worn out, because it evidently does not save, because it evidently has not transformed us; because we its professors are just as worldly, just as selfish, just as sinful, as the worst of its impugners; because *the children of this world are wiser,* far wiser, *in their generation than the children of light;* because *the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we,* we ourselves, *are not saved.* For the Gospel's sake, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, if not for our own sake, wipe out the reproach! Come to Him who casts out none who come to Him earnestly, that you may drink of that water which is life to the soul, and be emancipated for that service which is perfect freedom!

LECTURE XVIII.

THE HOPEFUL SIGN.

ACTS XVII. 11, 12.

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed.

He gave some, it is written of the gifts of Christ to men, *as evangelists; and some as pastors and teachers.* And the work of the two is different. The Evangelist comes first. *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace.* He comes where Christ is not yet named, to gather out of the unbelieving world *a people for His name.* And then he is followed by the pastor or teacher, who carries on by daily

ministration the work which the Evangelist has begun.

Now St Paul was acting on this journey as an Evangelist. He had a wide field to cover. Persecuted in one city, he must flee to another; or else the publication of the Gospel to all nations will never be made before the Lord come. As an Evangelist, he publishes the glad tidings, and hurries on: as an Apostle, he ordains in every city those pastors and teachers who are to build up the Church upon the one foundation once laid. The time came, indeed, when he was to be stopped in his work: but that hindrance must come in the direct course of God's Providence, and not by any imprudence or by any rashness of his own. St Paul could trust himself not to be cowardly: it was a grace therefore in him to be prudent.

Driven from Philippi, as we read last Sunday, after shame and suffering; but leaving behind him there the nucleus already formed of that happy and holy congregation to which he addressed, ten years later, one of the tenderest and most comforting of his Epistles; he took his journey, as the 1st verse of this chapter tells us, *through Amphipolis and Apollonia,* and *came to Thessalonica.*

Thessalonica, unlike some other places of which we read in the Scripture history, has retained its importance, and almost its name, to this very day. It is an imposing city, rising tier above tier on a steep ascent fronting the sea; and contains still some seventy thousand inhabitants, of whom many, now as in St Paul's days, are Jews by race.

In this city stood what is here called *the synagogue of the Jews:* I suppose, the synagogue of the district: in Philippi, you heard, there was none; only a customary place of prayer by the river side.

So Paul, *according to his custom,* first entered the synagogue; claimed his right to the national privilege, asserted his adherence to the national faith, and used the basis of a common belief in the Old Testament Scriptures as the means of building up the superstructure of a Saviour's doctrine. *For three Sabbath days he conversed* (or *reasoned*) *with them from the Scriptures; opening* to them that Book which was as yet closed and sealed from them as to its true meaning, *and alleging,* adducing evidence out of that Book itself to show, *that it was necessary that the Christ,* the Messiah, the promised Saviour, *should suffer, and rise from*

among the dead; and that this Person is the Christ, even *Jesus whom,* he said, *I announce to you. Necessary that the Christ should suffer;* because the Scriptures had so said, and because the Scriptures must be fulfilled. It is the very same argument, and the very same word, which our Lord Himself used to the two disciples on the evening of His resurrection. *Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?* And then, *beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* It is thus here with His Apostle. He shows, as he showed in detail, in the 13th chapter, at Antioch in Pisidia, first, that the Scriptures speak of a suffering Messiah, a Saviour dying and rising; and secondly, that these Scriptures all meet and are fulfilled in the proved and established history of Jesus of Nazareth.

And some of them were persuaded. Some: even when St Paul preached, not all. The heart must be opened to attend, or even an Apostle reasons and expostulates in vain. Some believed, even in that Jewish audience, *and attached themselves to Paul and Silas;* following up, as we read (in the 13th chapter) of some of

the hearers at Antioch, the public teaching by private converse, and seeking to improve to the uttermost their brief opportunity of profiting by an Apostle's presence. *And of the devout Greeks,* the worshipping Gentiles, that is, the proselytes to Judaism from among the Gentile inhabitants, *a great number, and of the chief women not a few.*

Thus the Gospel fire was thoroughly kindled; and that fire is a fire of division as well as of enlightenment. *The unbelieving Jews took to them some worthless men of the idle sort*—properly, *of the frequenters of the market-place;* of those idle loungers who are the plague of every town, destitute of proper occupation, and refusing that honest labour which is man's safety and man's glory—*and having made a mob they threw the city into disturbance; and besetting the house of Jason,* where the Apostle and his companions were lodging, *they sought to bring them before the people;* before the public assembly, which acted both as the legislature, and (in important cases) the tribunal also of the city. Failing to find the Apostles, *they dragged Jason,* the owner of the house, *and some brethren,* some of the new Christian converts, *before the magistrates.* It was the old

charge again. These men had *turned the world upside down* by their new doctrines. They were *acting in the face of the decrees of Cæsar*, of the Roman Emperor, *saying that there is another king*, one *Jesus. The disciple is not greater than his Lord.* This was the charge against the Saviour Himself. *Whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar. The superscription of His accusation was written over: This is Jesus the King of the Jews.* In vain is it answered, *My kingdom is not of this world.* In vain is it urged that the spiritual kingdom is consistent with, is a friend to, is the sure support of, every earthly throne: where there is a will to oppose, there will not be wanting a pretext; and the orderly and peace-loving Gospel is represented as a disloyal, a factious, a revolutionary innovation.

By an iniquitous sentence, Jason and his companions were bound over by due securities to preserve the peace of the city; and the Evangelists of the Lord and Saviour were in consequence banished from its walls. By night they were got out of the city, and after a journey of 50 or 60 miles they reached Berea, a town of less size and importance, but which has furnished the Christian reader in every

subsequent age with a far brighter and more profitable example.

On their arrival they went forth into the synagogue of the Jews. And these were more noble, more generous and more ingenuous, *than those at Thessalonica: for they accepted the word* spoken by Paul *with all readiness of mind, daily examining the Scriptures, whether these things were so* as he said; whether his arguments from the Old Testament were valid, in the two points; the prediction of a suffering Messiah, and the correspondence with that prediction of the life and the word, the character and the history of Jesus. *Many therefore from among them*—even here not all—*believed.*

Thus have we presented to us, within the compass of a few verses the history of the evangelization of two places; Thessalonica and Berea. In each there are points of resemblance; and there are also, between the two, points of difference.

The points of resemblance are, (1) the mode of the preaching, and (2) its twofold result: *some believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not.* It was so everywhere. But, looking at the two places generally and in summary, it is noticed that there was a con-

trast; a difference in their way of hearing and in their manner of enquiring into truth, even when (unhappily) the result of enquiry was not favourable to the Gospel.

1. It is deeply interesting to be able thus to individualize some of the congregations to which St Paul ministered. We all know that there are such differences now between different places and different congregations. There are personal varieties of character, and there are also local varieties. Between one country and another, between one part of one country and another part, between the North and South, between the East and the West, of our own country, there are many noticeable differences. A Clergyman settling in a new Parish is struck very speedily by some characteristic peculiarities even in the religious condition and disposition of his people. These characteristics are the result of many various and long-working influences. Often the ministry has to be blamed or praised for them. A town in which a faithful and exemplary pastor has long been at work, bears the impress of his hand for a generation or two after he has departed. And the absence of such a ministry; the defects of a man's preaching, the faintness of a man's zeal,

or the inconsistencies of a man's life; will leave an opposite stamp for years to come upon the state and character of his congregation. These things are matters of experience, and they are noticed for our admonition.

Most safely are they noticed, when we can turn for them to the Scripture. Who that reads the Epistles of St Paul could for one moment confuse or interchange the spiritual characteristics of the Churches of Corinth, of Philippi, of Galatia, of Thessalonica? Take the last of these. We have heard the disparagement of Thessalonica. Berea was more noble, because it received the word frankly, and searched the Scriptures for its confirmation or else for its refutation. In the same degree there is a reflection upon Thessalonica. It was *less* noble in this respect. But there were those, even in Thessalonica, who had all the nobleness of Berea. Look at St Paul's Epistle to them; his two Epistles; written the very first of all his Epistles, and not many months probably after he had first quitted them. Look at his account of that congregation from which he was so early separated. We scarcely know a more beautiful or a more encouraging portraiture. I commend it to your study. How it fills up

the gaps in the sacred narrative! How it peoples with living men and women the somewhat dry and summary record on which we have been dwelling!

(1) Observe there how St Paul had treated them: with what loving tenderness: like a father, he says; *we exhorted and comforted and charged you, as a father doth his children:* and then, lest that should not be enough, like a mother also; *we were gentle among you, even as a nursing mother cherisheth her own children.* What a picture of the true pastor! not a *lord over God's heritage,* not one *having dominion over their faith,* not one who rules and censures and threatens, but just a loving friend; as he himself says elsewhere, *a helper of their joy;* the kind father, yea the gentle mother also, of his people.

(2) Notice too, in another point, his conduct among them. *Ye remember,* he says, *our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable to any of you, we preached unto you the Gospel of God.* St Paul was a very diligent man. He was no idle lounger. He was not a man of society, affecting the manners or mingling in the amusements of the higher ranks of his people. He

worked at his own trade, and set an example to all men of the duty as well as the honour of fallen man eating bread in the sweat of his brow. If we, my brethren, by changes of times, and, as we trust, by God's overruling goodness, are exempted from the necessity of working for our bread in the exercise of this ministry, let us at least take heed that that toil which is saved from the one be given to the other; that nothing be more plain concerning us than that we work hard and work long; that we have indeed a calling, and a duty, and a toil too, amongst you, in which we may at once set an example and also cheer your way.

(3) It is still more profitable to remember what it was which St Paul taught his people. We have a full though incidental record of it in those two Epistles.

First of all, it was a Gospel. That was its character throughout. It was a message of comfort and joy to fallen man. It brought him the assurance of God's love. It told him that his sins are forgiven him for the Lord's sake. But it did not leave him even there. I know of no mockery so great, as that which tells a man of forgiveness and cannot tell of cleansing. What is it to me to be told that God forgives,

if you cannot add that God will take away from me my heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh? yea, will give me His Holy Spirit to live in me and to work in me effectually? This then was St Paul's doctrine: a free forgiveness first, and then also a free spirit.

And in the strength of that offer, of that promise, he was not afraid to preach to them of duty. He knew that, the higher the attainment proposed, the more comforting is the assurance implied. He who says, *Stretch forth thine hand,* says by implication, *I will enable thee.* Hence the true comfort of a call to holiness. God does not mock us, whatever man may do, by His summons to holiness and to freedom. *This is the will of God, even your sanctification:* and if it is His will that we should be holy, certainly He *will give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.* Hence flow all those particulars of duty of which the last chapter of that 1st Epistle to the Thessalonians contains so large a detail.

But St Paul knew—he was taught of God to know—that, if you would inspirit a man for duty, you must inspire a man with hope. Therefore he fixed their eyes upon a coming; a personal coming; an Advent of the Lord and

Saviour Jesus Christ; which should be to mankind the reparation of all evil and the introduction of all good: an Advent in which *blessed and holy is he who shall have part,* and in which moreover no man shall lose his interest by having died before it. *We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent* (*anticipate*) *them that are asleep.* Therefore *sorrow not,* he said to them, *concerning them that are asleep, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him* (*Jesus*).

He seems too, when he was with them, to have darkly foreshadowed to them some of those destinies of the Church and of the world in later time, into which even now we can but peer with doubt and guessing. The revelation of the Man of Sin, with his foregoing hindrances, his precursors and concomitants, must have formed an anxious and lowering accompaniment to the prediction of that Advent which is to consume him. And these things are or ought to be as much our expectation as theirs. For us, as for them, these things are still future; we dare not say, still distant. God keep us faithful to that twofold work of the Gospel in the Thessalonian

converts, *Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivereth us from the wrath to come.*

(4) There is yet one point to be noticed, before we turn, in the last place, from Thessalonica to Berea. And that is, the rapidity of the work of God in the congregation of which we have spoken. For three Sabbath days, St Luke here says, St Paul reasoned with them out of the Scriptures. He almost leaves us to the conclusion that three short weeks filled up the measure of St Paul's stay amongst them. But suppose it to have been prolonged beyond this narrowest limit. Still a few weeks at the very utmost must have comprised it: then he left them, and in the two Epistles he speaks only of what had passed in that one visit: he had never seen them again since he first parted from them by night to set forth to Berea. And yet—for this is the point of notice—what an account does he give of the work already wrought in them! *Remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.* Nay, *ye were ensamples to all who believe in*

Macedonia and Achaia. My brethren, it is our own fault if the Gospel of the grace of God works in any of us slowly, or works in any of us indecisively. A few short weeks are enough, in God's hand, not only for the first great transition from darkness to light, but even for a complete transformation of the heart and of the life. In a few short weeks, three or more, these Thessalonians had been turned in some cases—for so the words imply—from worshippers of dumb idols into servants of the living God and expectants of His Son from heaven. It pleases God now and then to give us, even us, a glimpse of the same possibility because of the working of the same power. The season of Confirmation has been blessed erenow—I humbly hope that it was blessed recently in some instances—to this great and glorious result. The man who confesses his sins heartily may find mercy at once: and the man who prays honestly for God's Holy Spirit may find himself at once made strong through Him unto a complete change of life.

(5) Yet let us not lose the force of that solemn admonition, that *he who thinketh he standeth* must always *take heed lest he fall.* Scarcely had St Paul left Thessalonica after

this marvellous experience of the converting and transforming grace of God, than he sends back Timotheus, in the extremity of his loving anxiety, to see *lest by any means the tempter had tempted them, and* so *his labour should be in vain.* We are still in an enemy's country, however armed. We are still in the region of death, however full of life. Even from our Lord Himself, after His great temptation, the devil *departed* but *for a season:* let us take heed, every one of us, lest confidence breed presumption, presumption sin, *and sin, when it is finished,* in us *bring forth death!*

2. And now, my brethren, one last word must suffice for the example of the other place brought before us this evening, the city of Berea. Its application is different from the former. In speaking of Thessalonica, we have spoken of the Christian congregation there gathered out of a world of Judaism or of heathenism. In speaking of Berea, we are to think of the proper treatment of the Gospel on the part of those who have not yet been convinced by it. The nobleness of the Bereans was shown not in their way of acting upon a Gospel already believed, but in their way of trying the credentials of a Gospel first heard. They carried

St Paul's statements to the standard which they already possessed. Believing, as Jews or proselytes, the Old Testament Scriptures, they went to those Scriptures for information, and they acted upon those Scriptures as their guide. They did not refuse the Gospel because it contradicted their previous opinions; neither did they, in an excess of credulity, receive it because it was presented to them. They listened to it with the readiness of a candid spirit, and they daily examined their Scriptures to see whether its language and their language were the same. *Many therefore of them believed.*

We, my brethren, are not exactly in their case, and yet we have much to learn, every one of us, from their example. If the teaching of this place were carried back by all of you to your Bible; if when we urge upon you any particular duty, or press upon your attention any feature or any side of the truth, you would *receive the word,* like these Bereans, and in the same sense only, *with all readiness,* and then examine your Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures to see whether what you have heard has God's sanction for it, or no; how interesting would become the work of hearing and (let me add) the work of teaching! You

would feel that you were engaged in a pursuit of truth; that it was not a question of pleasure or of natural interest in the things spoken, but a question of right and wrong, of truth or error, and therefore also of life and death: you would come hither not to criticize, but to learn; and you would go hence, not to discuss but to digest. You would go back to your Bible, to *compare spiritual things with spiritual*, and, according as you should find, so to judge and so to act. And we on our part should feel that we were furnishing matter for the most serious pondering and for the most important decisions; that we were aiding you in settling the most momentous questions, and that the words here uttered were indeed, under God's blessing, full of grave consequences both in hearts and lives.

May it be so more and more! Be assured that out of such enquiries and such reasonings within, springs forth a full-flowing stream of satisfaction, strength, and peace. The word here written speaks of an examination, a daily examination, of God's holy Book. It is the same expression which denotes the examination of a witness, or the trial of a challenged life. Let us thus put the Word of God upon its trial. Let us not treat it as a dead, unmeaning, mono-

tonous thing; to be carried in the hand, or read at Church, or suffered on the table; but rather as a living person, to be questioned, to be interrogated, to be heard and listened to and judged. Let us say to it, *What sayest thou? What dost thou tell me? What hast thou to offer in thine own behalf, or concerning another? Speak to me, answer me, be not silent; but speak, and hold not thy peace.* So treated, the Bible will become to us a voice, not a page only. So treated, we shall at last be able to say, *Thy Word is tried to the uttermost, and thy servant loveth it.* So treated, the consequence for us, as for the Bereans of old, will be this at last, *They searched the Scriptures daily; therefore many of them believed.*

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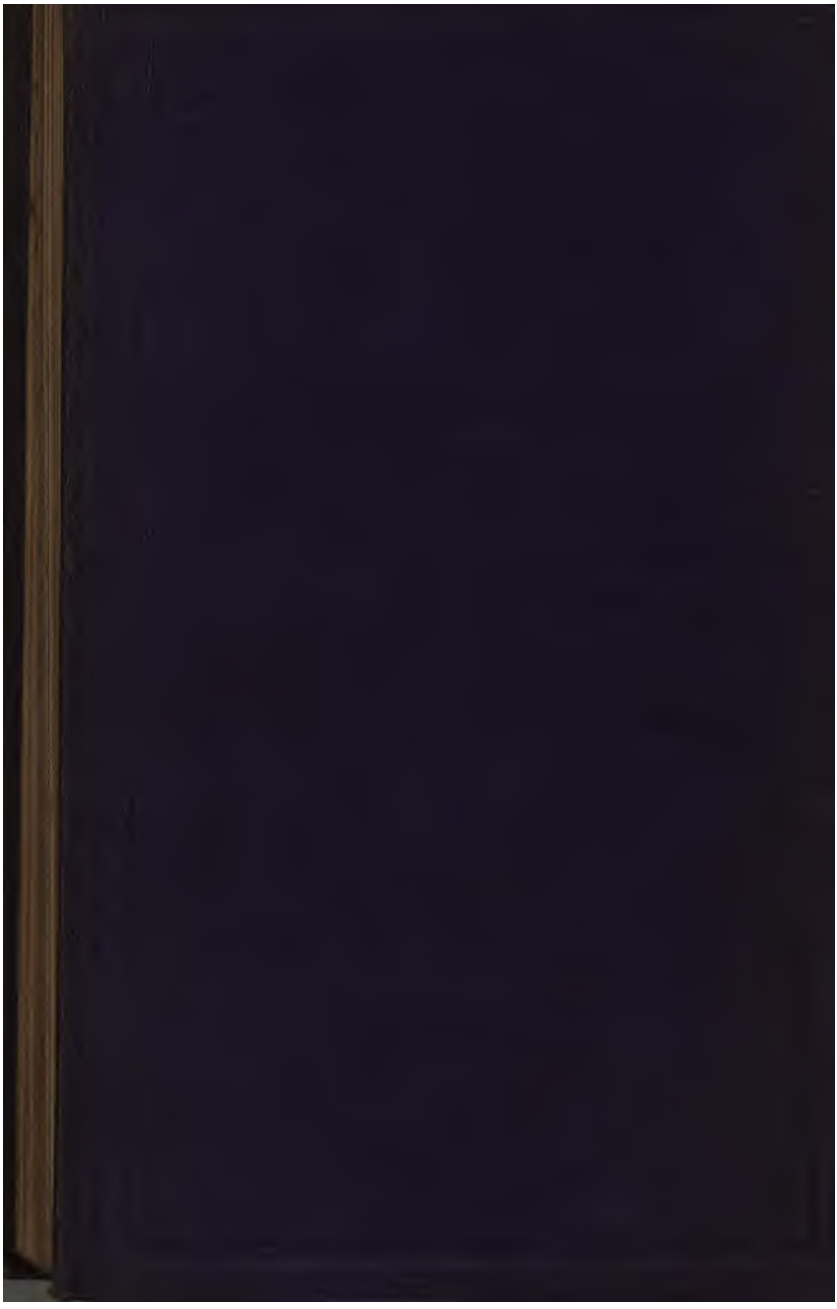
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